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PIONEERS IN EDUCATION

MONTAIGNE

AND EDUCATION OF THE JUDGMENT

BY

GABRIEL COMPAYRÉ

CORRESPONDENT OF THE INSTITUTE; DIRECTOR OF THE ACADEMY OF LYONS; AUTHOR OF "PSYCHOLOGY APPLIED TO EDUCATION," "LECTURES ON PEDAGOGY," "A HISTORY OF PEDAGOGY," ETC.

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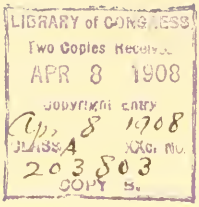
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PREFACE

Everything has been said regarding Montaigne, and to wish to speak of him again requires some boldness. Yet it is impossible to deny him, in our gallery of "Pioneers in Education," the place to which he has a right.

No doubt he gave us only a sketch. He did not go deeply into the problem of education; but he was full of its importance, and reverts to it continually in many a chapter of the *Essays*.

He is in no way a dogmatic theorist. In all things he is a dilettante. He idled along through the world of ideas, with the marvellous resources of his erudition, with the impulsive raciness of a keen and original mind. He "tickled" himself, as he says, with his imaginings. But in the matter of education he shows unaccustomed gravity, and this is certainly the subject on which he varied least. On how many pedagogical questions has he not left some deep or epigrammatic utterance, and of quite modern tendency?

He founded a school of pedagogy to which belong, whatever evil they may have spoken of him, the Recluses of Port-Royal, the mild Fénelon, the wise Locke, and even the revolutionist Rousseau. And that school is the school of common sense, the school which subordinates instruction to education, memory to judgment, science to conscience, and all studies to ethical teaching. "If the child's soul is not put into better trim, I would as soon see him playing tennis as studying."

The *Essays*, explored though they have been by a host of commentators, are an inexhaustible mine of impressions and ideas. The task of extracting the marrow therefrom is an endless one. We have drawn from them with full hands, and it is by quotations especially that we shall attempt to reproduce the features of Montaigne's moral physiognomy, and to define his views on education. Some of these may appear commonplace; they were not so in his day. Wrapt in an enchanting style, they have not aged; "they still smile to the reader in their fresh novelty."

Besides, there is some interest in opposing the ideas of a sixteenth-century educator to those which are current to-day. Lastly, let us add that, as time flows on and opinions change, the same book is interpreted in different ways by those who read it.

In a certain sense it becomes new and different when consciences animated by a new spirit cast their light upon it. The *Essays* are like a landscape, the aspect of which changes with the different hours of the day, according to the light which falls upon it, but which is ever pleasant to look upon, in the variety of its successive and ever changing appearances.

MONTAIGNE

I

Montaigne's Character

Montaigne is not an educationist solely because he has sketched offhand a plan for the education of children. He is one also — and perhaps most of all — by the action which his ideas taken as a whole have exercised for three centuries on his innumerable readers. There is no book the influence of which has made so deep a mark, for better or for worse, on the French mind, as that of the *Essays*. How many precepts of Montaigne's have passed into our everyday wisdom, and form a part of our moral inheritance! Should not the *Essays*, that moral biography in which a man of extraordinary intelligence lays himself bare in all the variety of his feelings, be considered as a book for the education of all men? While he draws his own likeness with absolute sincerity, "from head to foot," with a directness at times shameless, in his "hunger" to reveal himself, "probing the inner man to the very bowels," no more discreet regarding his faults

than regarding his qualities, Montaigne, on many a point, offers us examples, and gives us rules of conduct by which the man of the world of all times may profit. And this moralist has all the more influence on men's minds in that he lays no claim to impose his thought upon them. He does not preach; he does not even give advice; but he works his way into the imagination of all those that study him; he envelops them by his vigour and strength, and also by the happy grace of his deep or witty utterances.

He by no means poses as a model of virtue, be it either Christian or pagan: "I am neither an angel nor a Cato." He has escaped neither the passions nor the weaknesses of common men. But, through the very acknowledgment of his moral backslidings, which he owns to so frequently in a book a large part of which might just as well have for title the *Memoirs* or *Confessions* of Montaigne, he believes that he is accomplishing a useful work. By showing how not to do it, so to speak, he hopes to cure the faults of his fellow-men, as he lays bare his own. "It will profit others," he says, "to avoid imitating me. . . ." — "There is more instruction to be had from the avoidance of evil examples than from the imitation of those that are good." And again: "Wise men can learn more from fools than fools from wise men. . . ."

He studiously disclaims any pretensions to dogmatize: "This is no doctrine, but merely my own fancies, shapeless and tentative," — elsewhere he will call them "the bees in my bonnet." And yet he occasionally hints that his writings are immediately concerned with the amelioration of mankind, and that by some of his reflections at least he is working for the amelioration of his fellows. "How many times, when angry at some action which civility prohibited me from reproving openly, I have given vent to my feelings in these pages, *not without some purpose of educating the public!*"

Before expounding Montaigne's special views on education properly so-called, let us then read the *Essays* through again; let us renew acquaintance with the man, such as he has painted himself, and with the general tendencies of his mind. Let us tell what he was, and what he thought. In short, let us give a sketch of his character, and glance at his philosophy.

It is unnecessary to review in detail his uneventful life.[1] It would take too long to collect in this

[1] Montaigne was born at the castle of Montaigne, in Périgord, on the 28th of February, 1533. He died there on the 13th of September, 1592, of the quinsy. He entered the "Collège de Guyenne" in 1539, at the age of six, and left it in 1546. In 1555, at the age of twenty-two, he was appointed councillor at the *Cour des Aides* of Périgueux; then, in 1557, councillor at the Parliament of Bordeaux. He resigned this office in 1570, and spent the

place the results of the researches which the curious have directed to every nook and cranny of his existence, — to his ancestry, his friendships, his castle of Montaigne, and even the nature of his physical infirmities; in a word, to everything relating ever so remotely to this interesting personality. Everything has been rummaged and ferreted out. And yet one of the men who in our day has made the closest study and acquired the most intimate knowledge of the circumstances of Montaigne's life, who spent thirty years in gathering material for a comprehensive work which remained unfinished, Dr. Payen, wrote, in 1851, that "to write his biography was as yet an impossible task." [1]

There still remain, indeed, some obscure points in his life, in particular what became of him when in 1546, at the age of thirteen, he had ended his school studies at the Collège de Guyenne, at Bordeaux. It is supposed that he then studied law, probably at Toulouse, but this is not certain.

If the external history of Montaigne's life raises

remainder of his life in retirement in his castle, leaving his retreat only to be mayor of Bordeaux from 1581 to 1585, and to visit Italy (1580–1581). — The first two books of the *Essays* appeared in 1580, and the third book in 1588.

[1] Dr. Payen published between 1846 and 1870 a series of monographs on Montaigne. He bequeathed to the *Bibliothèque Nationale* more than 1500 works relating to his favourite author.

a few questions which have not yet been solved, it seems as though the history of his soul should be easy to write. Of a man who described himself with so much complacency, who said, "I dare not only to speak of myself, but to speak only of myself," how is it possible that critics have not yet succeeded in drawing a portrait which may be accepted as final? How can they be so utterly at variance in their judgments of him? According to some, Montaigne is a sceptic, an Epicurean, a selfish egotist, an idler; according to others, he is a rationalist, a Stoic, a man of a large heart, and a lover of work. Whom shall we believe? All of these critics perhaps; for in his ever fluctuating thoughts and tastes, Montaigne was at once each and every one of these. He is an ever changing Proteus, of whom it might be said, as Fénelon did of Alcibiades, that "he assumes the most contrary forms." Did not his friend La Boëtie say to him: "You are an Alcibiades"? Was not Montaigne thinking of his own character when he declared that "the most beautiful souls are those which show most variety and flexibility"? He escapes every attempt at classification. He is not the man of one exclusive form; no one system holds him in bondage. He unites in his rich nature the most opposite qualities. And it is precisely those ever recurring con-

trasts of his elusive and changeful character which partly explain the contradictions of his numerous critics.

It is one of the ironies, and so to speak a mockery, of the history of education in France, that some of the men whom we appeal to, and with good reason, for the highest lessons in pedagogy, were not themselves educationists by profession, and did not personally practise the art of which they laid down the principles. Nay! They took no care to bring up their own children and conscientiously to fulfil their paternal duties. J. J. Rousseau handed over his sons and daughters to the tender mercies of the foundlings' hospitals. Montaigne did not show himself an unnatural father to the same degree, but he is at least to be blamed in this, that he bore very lightly the loss of four of his daughters, who died in their infancy: "They all die at nurse, . . ." he says.

What are we to think of a father who, more of an author than of a father, would rather have written a fine book than live again in his children? "The offspring of our mind lie closer to our hearts. There are few men given to poetry who would not be prouder to be the fathers of the *Æneid* than of the finest boy in Rome." With a flippancy which is surely in bad taste, Montaigne affects not to remember exactly

how many children he has lost.[1] "I lost two or three children, not without regret, but without grieving." Did he at least interest himself in the education of the daughter who remained to him? No. "She has been brought up by her mother," he says, "privately and in retirement. . . . I interfere in no way with her mother's authority. Feminine rule has mysterious ways of its own, and must be left to women. . . ."

If he was too careless a father to condescend to interest himself in shaping the mind of his only daughter, he would seem to have shown the same indifference as a husband, and to have kept his wife rather far from his thoughts and his heart. What he especially required of her was that she should have the virtues of a good housekeeper.

"I require of a married woman, above all other virtues, an understanding of domestic economy. . . . The most useful and honourable science and occupation of the mother of a family is the science of housekeeping. It angers me to see, in several

[1] One is all the more surprised at this somewhat flippant declaration, as Montaigne noted down very exactly all family events in a copy of Beuthers's *Ephémérides*, which has been found. We gather from it that his daughter Léonor, the only one who lived, was born in 1571; she was his second child. In 1574 and 1577, he makes notes of the birth of a fourth and of a fifth daughter, and in 1583, of a sixth daughter, all of whom, like two of those who had preceded them, died when scarcely a few months old.

homes, the husband return, dull and dejected through the worries of business, towards midday, to find his wife still dressing her hair and titivating in her private apartment."

Montaigne admits that he was not intended for married life, for what he lightly calls the "vulgar pleasures" of wedlock. He had married Françoise de la Chassaigne in 1565, at the age of thirty-two, to conform to custom, and to please his parents, rather than through natural inclination. He was personally so little disposed to marry that he writes, in whimsical mood: "Of my own free will, I should have got out of marrying Wisdom herself, had she been anxious to have me!"

No doubt he will say of marriage that it is "a wise bargain," "one of the finest of the component parts of society"; but this legal institution receives no share of Montaigne's heart. He lays down as a principle that love, true love, cannot exist between husband and wife: "A good marriage, if there are any such, declines to keep company with love." Thus we should speak no more of conjugal love, but at the very most of conjugal friendship.[1]

If Montaigne offers nothing exemplary, far from it, as a husband or as a father, he was, on the other

[1] He has dared write without circumlocution: "The great Cato like ourself was tired of his wife."

hand, a model son, and a hero in friendship. He speaks but little of his mother, it is true, although he spent his whole life beside her.[1] But he worshipped his father.[2] With what pious veneration he speaks of him, after losing him in 1568! . . . "The good father whom God gave me, who got nothing from me except gratitude for his kindness, but that, truly, of the liveliest. . . ." Montaigne's filial piety manifests itself in acts of touching delicacy. He nearly always dressed in black and in white, in memory of his father's ways. He liked to use, to cover himself with his father's old cloak, because it seemed to him that he thus "wrapped himself up in him." But he was especially anxious to continue his father's traditions, to treasure his moral inheritance, to obey him still, although he was dead: "It is my proud boast that my father's will is still alive and active within me."

But it was especially in his affection for Étienne de la Boëtie, the author of the famous pamphlet, *On Voluntary Servitude*, that Montaigne showed of what warmth of feeling his heart was capable.

[1] Montaigne's mother, Antoinette de Louppes, of Spanish, and probably of Jewish extraction, survived her son, and did not die until ten years after him, on the 4th of April, 1601.

[2] Montaigne's father, originally a tradesman, had been ennobled, and had given up commerce for a military career. He followed Francis I into Italy. He was successively *jurat*, or magistrate, provost, and mayor of Bordeaux.

Read once again the admirable letter which he wrote to his father on the death of his friend, and also that divine chapter in the *Essays* which he has devoted to Friendship. Never has any one spoken in such moving terms of the love which may unite two souls, so entirely that "they obliterate and can no longer find the seam which joined them." Never did any love song, in its most ardent effusions, equal this hymn to Friendship. "If I should be urged to tell why I loved him, I feel that my only answer can be: 'Because it was he, because he was myself.'" Never did human souls mingle and blend in a more intimate or a closer embrace. It was a universal fusion and "commixture, which having seized all my will, induced the same to plunge and lose itself in his; which likewise having seized all his will, brought it to lose and plunge itself in mine, with a mutual greediness and with a like concurrence. . . ." A La Rochefoucauld would perhaps say that self-esteem, mutual admiration, the personal satisfaction of finding one's self appreciated and understood, played their part in this burning and passionate friendship. What does it matter, if from this blend of inferior motives there arises, in all its purity, the flame of a sincere affection, ready for any self-sacrifice? When La Boëtie was first struck down by the illness which was to carry him off at the age

of thirty-three, — the age at which Pascal died, — he gave his friend to understand that his disease might be infectious, and advised him therefore to keep away, and to come and see him only occasionally, for a few short moments. . . . How did Montaigne act? "From that hour," he says, "I never left him. . . ." [1]

Montaigne's friendship for La Boëtie was the great passion of his life. It was "a whole-hearted and perfect" friendship, "one and indivisible," each one giving himself up so entirely to his friend that "there remained nothing to him to bestow elsewhere"; an exclusive friendship which caused Montaigne to turn with loathing from all other "vulgar and common friendships"; it was like a first love, when, the soul having surrendered itself entirely, the fountain springs of the heart seem to have dried up for life. Montaigne, to be sure, was acquainted with other feelings than that of friendship. In somewhat free and crude terms he makes us the

[1] La Boëtie died on the 18th of August, 1563, of dysentery. Born at Sarlat in 1530, he was three years older than Montaigne. Appointed Councillor at the Parliament of Bordeaux in 1552, he had Montaigne for a colleague from 1557, and it was there that they formed their close friendship, founded on a perfect community of feelings. Nothing indeed could be further from the truth than to write: "How could these two friends think so differently while they loved each other so closely?" (Combes, *Study on the political ideas of Montaigne and of La Boëtie.*)

confidants of the love affairs of which he had more than one in his youth. But "there was no part he could play so well as that of a friend;" and he does not hesitate to express his preference for a friend, "a rare and exquisite friend," over the sweetest of sweethearts.

"These two passions entered my heart in full knowledge of each other, but were never to be compared; the former — friendship — ever pursued its proud and lofty flight, and looked down disdainfully on the other, fluttering to and fro far beneath her. . . ."

Montaigne enjoyed the intimate friendship of La Boëtie for only four years, but he never forgot it. Eighteen years after his death, amidst all the interests of his Italian journey, he wrote in his *Journal*, or Diary: "I fell to thinking so sadly of M. de la Boëtie, and dwelt so long on these thoughts, that it did me the greatest harm." And in the *Essays*: —

"If I compare my whole life with the four years during which it was granted to me to enjoy the sweet company and society of that friend, it is naught but smoke; it seems but a dark and wearisome night. Since the day when I lost him, I have only dragged languidly along, and the very pleasures that offer themselves to me, instead of comforting me, make me feel his loss twice as keenly; we shared

everything together, and it seems to me that I am stealing his share. . . ."

But it is not only through the sentimental effusions of his inconsolable regret that Montaigne has given proof of the faithfulness of his attachment to his vanished friend. If he often complained of his memory, which was "marvellously apt to fail him," he claims — and gave ample proof — that his heart at least could remember. And indeed, he never ceased to give tokens of his devotion to his friend, — an active devotion; he published La Boëtie's works; he took his part against those who in good faith, after reading his pamphlet on *Voluntary Servitude* — that republican manifesto of which Villemain said that it was "like an ancient manuscript found among the ruins of Rome, under the shattered statue of the youngest of the Gracchi," — might have been tempted to look upon its author as a disturber of public order, as a dangerous revolutionist. No; careful of La Boëtie's memory, prudent Montaigne would not allow it to be admitted that the brilliant writer whom he had loved so well and of whom he said that, had he lived, "he would have been the greatest man of his time," was naught but a rebel and a sedition-monger. He never tires of repeating that on the contrary "there never was a better citizen, one who was more anxious for the

peace of his country, or more averse to the disturbances and novelties of his time." And as it may appear difficult to justify this certificate of political wisdom, granted to a pamphleteer who, with burning eloquence, pleaded the cause of liberty against tyranny, the cause of the peoples against their kings, who calls those who are in office "devourers of the people," and religion "the body-guard of tyrants," Montaigne endeavours to lessen the import of La Boëtie's words, to produce extenuating circumstances. According to him, this pamphlet is a work of early youth,[1] the declamation of a sixth-form schoolboy, steeped in the works of the ancients, hardly eighteen years of age, or even sixteen, as Montaigne maintains on second thoughts in a later edition of the *Essays*. It was in order not to compromise by fresh publicity the memory of his adopted brother, like "those who sought to disturb and change our political state," and who had already printed his work "with evil intent," that Montaigne abstained from inserting in his

[1] *On Voluntary Servitude* was printed in 1576, in the *Mémoires de l'État de France sous Charles IX*, published by Simon Goulart. La Boëtie had written it at the age of sixteen or eighteen, according to Montaigne, *i.e.* in 1546 or 1548. The latter date is the more probable, for the indignation which animates the young writer may then be explained by the bloody repression which the Constable Anne de Montmorency exercised at Bordeaux in 1548, in the king's name.

own book the text of La Boëtie's pamphlet, and set in its place twenty-nine more inoffensive sonnets, which do no less credit to La Boëtie's poetical talent.[1]

A heart as sensitive to friendship as that of Montaigne cannot be taxed with coldness. The wound of his shattered affection never ceased to bleed. Besides, Montaigne by no means showed lack of feeling in his actions taken as a whole. He sought, more than he succeeded in attaining, the state of tranquil indifference, the ataraxy of the philosophers. I am well aware that his rule of life was to suffer as little as possible, and to keep far from him anything that might have afflicted him or disturbed his peace of mind. I am aware that he, before Montesquieu, said that reading and study drove away his grief: "The company of books takes the edge off pain," — and in short that, for reasons of health as much as of wisdom, he endeavoured to look on the best side of everything.

[1] On this subject one may consult an interesting communication made to the *Académie des Sciences morales et politiques* on the 30th of January, 1904, by Dr. Armaingaud. According to M. Armaingaud, it was Montaigne himself, whom La Boëtie had appointed heir to his books, as his "intimate brother and close friend," who communicated to some Protestant polemical writers the text of the pamphlet on *Voluntary Servitude*, which they were the first to publish. M. Armaingaud even believes that Montaigne added with his own hand several passages to the original text. There is much that is obscure in Montaigne's complicated nature.

But in spite of all his efforts, his soul was filled with genuine and tender kindness. He was almost inclined to reproach himself with what he called "his extraordinary weakness for pity." — "I sympathize keenly with the afflictions of others. . . . The sight of the anguish of another fills me with distinct anguish." — He even owns to being somewhat oversensitive, since, he says, he could not see a chicken slaughtered, without a feeling of pain. He shows love even to animals, can refuse nothing to his favourite dog, and although a keen huntsman, "he can hardly bear to hear a hare cry under the teeth of his dogs." The smallest trifle would put him about. "If my horse has been badly bridled, or the loose end of a stirrup-leather beats against my legs, I am out of sorts for the whole day." This sage was afflicted with nerves; the least buzzing of a fly was martyrdom to him. And, what is more interesting still, he grieved over "the indigence and oppression of the poor people." There is no doubt that the grievous spectacle of the civil wars of his time caused him suffering; it went to his heart to see his country rent asunder. If, in 1570, eighteen months before the massacre of St. Bartholomew, he withdrew, at the age of thirty-seven, within his castle, if he shut himself up in his ivory tower, it was because he was sick of his century, a "spoilt

century" in which "lying was rampant," in which the different factions vied with each other in deceit and cruelty; it was because he could not get used to so savage an age. He stood aloof, that he might no longer view at such close quarters the misery of his country, and it is not without reason that some one has said that his retreat reminds us of that of Alceste, fleeing from the world and from Célimène because he loved them too well.

Montaigne's detractors have not spared him any more in his public than in his private life. They make him out to have been indifferent to the affairs of his country and careless of his duties as a citizen. Here, again, there is a legend to be exploded. He does not, indeed, seem to have been born for action. He was too fond of peaceful rest, and of ease, to have a taste for active life, with all the hardships which it involves. And yet he seems to have loved soldiering, "the noblest of professions." This taste manifests itself in the choice which he makes of his three greatest men: a poet, Homer, and two military leaders, Alexander the Great, whom he ranks with either Cæsar, or Epaminondas.[1] If he did not seek after "high fortunes and commands," if he avoided "scrambling to rise above the position in

[1] Montaigne had seen active service on several occasions in the ranks of the army of the king against the Huguenot troops.

which God placed him at his birth," it was, he admits, because "he was overfond of his ease." Not, indeed, that he despised honours. He was proud of having been made a knight of the order of Saint-Michael by King Charles IX, in 1571; prouder still perhaps of having been appointed by the future Henry IV, in 1577, gentleman of the chamber to the king of Navarre. Though he does not confess to it in the *Essays*, we know from his *Diary of Travel* [1] that during his stay in Rome he took every step to obtain the title of Roman citizen, which he bore with great pride. "I spared no effort to obtain the letters of Roman citizenship." He appreciated purely honorary dignities, what one might call platonic honours, but he preferred to waive aside with a disdainful hand, lest his nonchalant day-dreams should be disturbed, those offices which involved duties, hard work, and heavy responsibilities. He resigned in 1570, at the earliest possible moment, his seat in the Parliament of Bordeaux. And if he was elected mayor of that town in 1581, this mandate

[1] Montaigne's journey lasted nearly a year and a half, from the 22d of June, 1580, to the 30th of November, 1581. The Ms. of his Diary was found, one hundred and eighty years after his death, in an old strong-box, by Canon Prunis, who was on a visit at Montaigne's castle. Montaigne's heirs may well be taxed with neglect for forgetting among the dust of the attics so priceless a manuscript.

was quite unsolicited, since the vote of his fellow-citizens brought him back from Italy, where he had been travelling for a year.

Though Montaigne confesses that he took only a "languid interest" in public affairs, we must not conclude that he proved inferior to his task when called upon to act by circumstances. The mayor of Bordeaux was wanting neither in abnegation nor in vigilance. Read the letters which he addressed to Marshal de Matignon, his Majesty's lieutenant-general in Guyenne; they show with what active solicitude he watched over the interests which were entrusted to him. Amidst the turmoil of civil war, face to face with perpetual threats of attack and invasion, he has an eye for everything; he inspects the defensive works, he remains on foot and on the alert at night, although "nothing is stirring," in order to be ready for any eventuality. "I spent every night under arms in the town, or else outside the town at the harbour." It is sufficient proof that he showed himself worthy of the confidence of his fellow-citizens, that, contrary to custom, he was re-elected mayor for two years in 1583. He reminds us, not without some show of vanity, that "this had only occurred twice before." His "languid nature" had evidently not prevented him from worthily fulfilling his trust.

"I wish these people well with all my heart," he said, "and certainly, if occasion had arisen, I should have spared nothing in their service."

But the occasion did arise, one will say — the plague which visited Bordeaux in 1585; and Montaigne is supposed to have then failed in his duty by deserting his post and faint-heartedly protecting his life from the danger of contagion. Let us reëstablish the facts, and note, first of all, that Montaigne was absent from Bordeaux when the scourge fastened on the town. Must we then find fault with him for not returning to it? But wherein could his presence have benefited the unfortunate people of Bordeaux, during a disastrous epidemic which, according to contemporaries, in six months laid more than 14,000 victims in their graves?[1] On the 30th of July, 1585, Montaigne wrote from Libourne to the magistrates of Bordeaux: —

"I shall spare neither my life, nor aught else, in your service, and leave it to you to decide whether that which I can render you through my presence, at the coming elections, is worth my venturing into the town, in its present evil plight."

So he placed himself at the disposal of those under

[1] This is an enormous number, and must surely be exaggerated, since the whole population of Bordeaux, at that time, hardly exceeded 40,000 inhabitants.

his charge, who did not recall him, as they considered they had no need for him. Let us add that the plague had appeared even in Montaigne's castle, that he had to flee, and that for several months he wandered from place to place, with all his family, to escape the epidemic.

"I went in painful quest of a retreat for my family, — a wandering family, feared alike by their friends and by each other, objects of horror wherever they sought to settle down; obliged to change their abode if only one of the band complained of a pain in his finger. . . . For six dreary months I acted as guide to this caravan. . . ."

There are therefore several points to urge in Montaigne's favour, to justify him for apparently shirking his civic duties. The truth is that he did not think himself obliged to run uselessly after danger, without its profiting any one: "I shall follow the right-minded party up to the stake, but stop short of it, if I can." — "Let Montaigne be involved in the public ruin, if need be; if there be no need, I shall be grateful to fortune if he escapes." Prudence is not cowardice, and to make free to blame Montaigne in this circumstance would be to show one's self unduly exacting, unless a man is worthy of the name only on condition that he has a taste for useless self-sacrifice and unseasonable heroism.

If Montaigne kept aloof as much as he could from public offices, "game he had no liking for," as he used to say in his hunting language, he was never indifferent, however, to the events of his time and to the fortunes of France.[1] He witnessed as a spectator, without taking any part in them, the tragedies which were enacted around him, but he was an attentive and sad spectator, sometimes bitter and full of anger in his judgments. "There is so much corruption in the affairs of my time that I could not mingle in them." And he buried himself anew, not without some impatience, in the reading of his favourite authors; he took refuge in the wisdom of the ancients, to turn aside and divert his mind from present follies, to forget, or try to forget, a time when "evil-doing was so common." — "This century is so depraved that whoever is guilty only of parricide and sacrilege is looked upon as a man righteous and honourable." Yet his anxious and inquisitive mind would not allow him to remain long absorbed in studious meditation. From within his library, he followed the course of events. Situated by his place of residence "at the very centre of disturbance of the civil wars of

[1] In 1558 Montaigne was at the siege of Thionville. In 1559 he followed Francis II to Bar-le-Duc. In 1588 he was present at the States of Blois, where the Duc de Guise was murdered.

France," —his castle was ransacked more than once by bands of plunderers, — "he was all the more inclined to turn his thoughts to the affairs of the State and of the universe without, when he was alone," when he had leisure for reflection. He had tears to shed for the unfortunate Mary Stuart, "the fairest queen in the world, widow of the greatest king in Christendom. . . . She has just died by the hand of the executioner; an infamous and barbarous piece of cruelty!"

What was his attitude amidst the religious or political factions which were rending France? That of a faithful citizen, or at least of a faithful subject, whose loyalty remained unshaken under five successive kings, Henry II, Francis II, Charles IX, Henry III, and Henry IV. "I shall spare neither my care, nor, if need be, my life, to uphold the king's authority in everything." His attitude was also that of a philosopher of independent mind, who judges impartially, and from a high standpoint, both men and things, and who never abdicates the rights of his conscience; he remains a stranger to the violent passions, to the furious hatred, of the various parties, keeps cool, and bears himself calmly and judiciously through this period of universal folly.

Montaigne was never a courtier, although he lived,

now and again, "amidst the agitation of court." He did not adapt himself easily to the ways of princely companies. He loathed ceremony. He disliked to "hang about," to parley with some "wretched unknown usher." Free and independent, too unbending to lend himself to the whims of princes, it was not in him to approve of all the acts of the monarch, "in troublous and distempered times, when the public weal is best served by treason, falsehood, and massacre." He would willingly have appropriated La Boëtie's proud maxim, "Let us obey our parents, own allegiance to Reason, live in bondage to no one." He said himself: "I will be a slave only to Reason;" and also to Law. "The laws have relieved me of great distress; they have traced a rule of conduct for me and given me a master."

And however great his loyalty, when he speaks in all freedom, he has harsh words for kings, who are after all only men such as others are, "common folk," and even "adventurers, less than the least of their subjects, from whom they differ, so to speak, only by their hose." He anticipated Pascal in saying, "It is not my reason which bends and yields before the great: it is my knees."

Montaigne, of course, knew that it is the duty of a citizen not to remain neutral in questions of

national importance: "It would be treason, so to speak, not to take sides. . . . To remain uncertain, to 'sit on the fence' with regard to the difficulties of one's own country, appears to me neither seemly nor worthy." But he did not always conform strictly to this rule of conduct. He was too independent to enroll himself absolutely under one party. He discerned with rare insight the qualities and faults, the virtues and vices, of the men who contended for power. He could appreciate the qualities of the Dukes of Guise, for whom he had conducted secret negotiations at the States of Blois, in 1588; he even carried to some excess his admiration for Cardinal de Lorraine, "that much begrimed soul," as Brantôme said, whom Montaigne looked upon as "necessary for the public weal." But on the other hand, he was loud in his praise of Michel de l'Hôpital; he visited him, in 1571, in his place of retreat at Vignay, and said to him, "I wish to do homage and show reverence to the peculiar qualities which are in you." He was in constant relation with those in authority at his time, and was admitted into their confidence. He never said to the one "what he could not have said to the other," for "there is nothing to prevent one from acting loyally between men who are enemies."

What high lessons in moderation we receive from

this philosopher, lost amidst a world of fanatics and sectarians! He looked down upon the stream of intrigue and of hatred with eyes "less blinded with passion" than those of his contemporaries. "I am animated with passions neither of hatred nor of love toward the great; my will is fettered neither through personal injuries nor through personal obligations." Let us profit by his wise advice, which applies equally to all times. Montaigne would not allow a man to be looked upon as a traitor or a turncoat, because he took the liberty of criticising certain acts of his friends or of approving certain ideas of his adversaries. He would have none of that passive obedience which enrolls all consciences under one flag, and which forbids any independence of opinion.

"I have no words strong enough to condemn this vicious way of thinking! — He belongs to the 'Ligue,' for he admires the urbanity of M. de Guise! — He is amazed at the activity of the king of Navarre; he is a Huguenot! — He finds something to criticise in the king's manner of life; he is preaching sedition!"

Montaigne shared the fate suffered by impartial minds at all times: he incurred the disfavour of every party. "For the Ghibelline I was a Guelph, for the Guelph a Ghibelline." However careful he

was not to compromise himself, since, to avoid blows, he would have hidden "even under the skin of a calf," he did not always succeed. If ever he experienced a surprise in his life, it was certainly on the day in 1588, when he saw himself arrested and incarcerated for a few hours in the Bastille by the partisans of the Duke of Guise.[1]

Montaigne was among those who "were amazed at the activity of the king of Navarre." At the time of his municipal administration, on the 19th of December, 1584, he received him, not without pomp, with all his court, in his castle in Périgord. He did not await the king's conversion to wish and hope for his triumph. In 1590 he wrote to him: "Even when I had to confess it to my priest, I was ever with you in your successes; now I am wholeheartedly on your side."

But, whatever his respect for the personality of kings, Montaigne was never slow to speak freely to them and to give them advice. In what noble language, for instance, did he address Henry IV! With what loftiness of political views he encouraged him to clemency, reminding him that with regard to the affections of a people, "it never rains but it pours," and that if only once the tide of popular good-will should set in his favour, its own impetus

[1] He was immediately released by order of Catharine of Medici.

would carry it on irresistibly." With regard to those who had been rebellious and disaffected, he asked that the victor, even in the first flush of victory, should treat them "with greater kindness than their protectors themselves had done." And he concluded this sketch of the education of a prince, by wishing that his Majesty "might be rather cherished than feared of his people."

Montaigne has the poorest opinion of human nature. If he urges us to study and "probe" ourselves, it is partly that we may recognize "of what weak and tottering pieces our whole fabric is built up." "It appears to me," he dares to say, "that we can never be despised according to our deserts."

"Of all the opinions which the ancients had of man in general, I am most inclined to adopt those which make us most contemptible, vile, and insignificant."

He sees in man much malice and stupidity, and even more stupidity than malice. We seem to be listening to Schopenhauer or Nietzsche. And if he includes the whole of humanity in a universal contempt, he particularly dislikes that of his own time. Abhorring falsehood as he does, it disgusts him to see that "feint and dissembling," vices for which he has a "deadly hatred," have become "the most notable qualities of a depraved century." Rous-

seau will oppose the virtues of man in the state of nature to the vices of man in a state of civilization. Montaigne would not gainsay this view, but he would rather incline to place the golden age at Athens or at Rome, with the ancients, whom he thinks superior to modern men.

"We do not," he says, "possess their vigour of mind. . . . Our will is as much impaired as theirs ever was, but we cannot equal them, either in the refinements of pleasure, or in virtue."

But Montaigne belongs to his time and shares all its prejudices in his opinion of women. He knows no better yet than to subordinate the life of woman to that of man; he looks upon woman as born to serve. Let us excuse him; two hundred years later, Rousseau will hold the same views. Montaigne can imagine for her no royalty but that of beauty; her sovereignty consists in being charming and graceful. "Where the ladies have a real advantage is in their beauty." He has indeed much to say about them, and in the *Essay* entitled *Of three Commerces or Societies*, *i.e.* men, books, and women, he enters into long dissertations on feminine intercourse. In his travels, if he is a keen observer of all things, he by no means neglects to look at women; in the towns through which he passes, he is careful to note their manner of dress and their

adornment; he distinguishes between their different degrees of beauty. He expresses the opinion, for instance, that in Italy there are not so many handsome women as in France, but that there are fewer ill-favoured ones. At Rome, he even visits women of doubtful morals. Like Socrates, he frequents Aspasia, but he is careful to reassure us, and warns us that his intercourse with courtesans is limited to "mere conversation," a precaution which is perhaps not unnecessary, coming from a man who confessed to having known "love in its most frenzied forms," and who needed to be ever on his guard, "being one of those in whom the flesh is weak."

But however sensitive he may have been to the attractions of the fair sex, Montaigne nearly always showed himself unjust in his appreciation of their intellectual capacity, as also of their moral worth. He sets women apart in a world of their own, that of their "own and natural riches"; he will not allow them to participate in the labours of men, and does not consider them fitted for mental work. Long before Molière, he holds that they are learned enough "when they can distinguish between their husband's shirt and his doublet." He likes to speak ill, not only of their intelligence, but of their character. Consider the beginning of the chapter entitled "Of

Three Good Women." Does he only know of three, then, in spite of his great learning? "They are not to be found by the dozen," he says, "particularly with regard to their conjugal duties. . . ."

He would not even admit that a woman was capable of friendship, that feeling "in which," he said, "I am an expert."

"There is no example of this sex having ever yet attained to it. . . . The ordinary endowments of women are not such as will suffice for the close communion which fosters this holy bond; their soul does not appear to be firm enough to stand the strain of so tight and so enduring a knot."

Nor can we refrain from smiling when we see our philosopher call upon the authority of the ancients to corroborate his opinion: "By common consent of all ancient schools this sex has been denied any participation in friendship."

Women, thus disgraced in Montaigne's mind, would have good cause to be indignant. But one should never quarrel with him for an overhasty word, for some rather harsh judgment which he may have risked. He is apt to withdraw, to contradict, what he has advanced. In the perpetual fluctuation of his thought, there is never anything definite. After judging women so unfavourably, he suddenly turns round, — a familiar trick of his, — he changes his

mind, and in other passages of the *Essays*, he does them full justice. It is pleasant to hear him say that "it is vain arrogance on the part of men to assume over them some vague preëminence in courage and virtue." We might almost be listening to a latter-day "feminist" when he declares that "women are not at all wrong to decline to recognize the rules of living which obtain in this world, since it is men who framed them, and without consulting women." This scoffer goes so far as to say, "Males and females are cast in the same mould; there is no great difference between them, save such as has been wrought by education and custom. . . ." And he insists: —

"If women attain less often than men to high degrees of excellence, it is a wonder that this lack of a good education has not a worse result. Is there any more difference between men and them than there is among themselves according to the education which they have received, according as they have been brought up in town or in the country, or according to their nature? Why, with proper intellectual nourishment, should it not be possible to bridge the interval which exists between their understanding and that of men?"

So, to become man's equal, woman is only awaiting better intellectual "nourishment," a better

education; it is to be regretted that Montaigne, who understood so well the necessity of it, did not take the trouble to outline it.

If Montaigne's good sense had not been enough to compel him to this retractation, we may believe that toward the end of his life the friendship of Mlle. de Gournay would have contributed to modify and to soften the severity of his judgments on woman. The devotedness of her whom he called "his daughter of alliance," [1] and who was supremely proud and happy of this title, touched him to the quick. He was not without some legitimate vanity, and although he says jestingly of his book that it will only serve "to keep some piece of butter from melting in the market-place," he was not without some idea of the value of the *Essays*. His vanity as a writer was agreeably tickled by the ingenuous admiration of a young lady of twenty, who in her bombastic and somewhat peculiar style said of the *Essays* that they were "the judicial throne of reasons, the accession to manhood of the mind, the resurrection of truth." At this outburst of feminine sympathy, Montaigne was delighted, though rather taken aback. "That she, a woman, in that century, and so young, should thus have understood and

[1] This is Florio's translation of "*sa fille d'alliance.*" (Translator's note.)

extolled him," evidently disturbed his disdainful estimate of feminine understanding. "The great vehemence with which she for long loved me and desired my acquaintance," — she only entered into relations with him in 1588, four years before his death,[1] — appeared to him as "an accident most worthy of consideration"; note, however, that he says an "accident," as if he persisted in excluding women from participation in friendship. He at least admitted her to his own, and went so far as to say: "She is all I have left in this world. . . . She is one of the best parts of my own being. . . ."

Montaigne lived in constant communion with books. He was a reader before aught else. His library, fairly well stocked with about a thousand volumes, was a fine one, he said, "among village libraries." He never travelled without books, either in peace or in war. He knew of no better provision for our journey through life. It was in his study that he spent "most of the days of his life, and most of the hours of each day."

He was not content with reading much; he could appreciate the worth of what he read. He may be looked upon as the creator of literary criticism,

[1] There was not only correspondence, but mutual visiting, between Montaigne and Mlle. de Gournay. He went to see her at her castle in Picardy, in 1588, and Mlle. de Gournay returned his visit at Montaigne.

and it would be easy to compose an Art of Writing by bringing together various passages scattered through the *Essays*.

The perspicacity of his literary taste is rarely at fault. His only blunder, almost, was his judgment on Rabelais, when he set down *Gargantua* among the books that are "merely intended to amuse us," like the *Decameron* of Boccaccio and the *Basia* of Johannes Secundus. His erudition was most extensive, although he always poses as an ignoramus. It is true that he knew nothing of Greek, greatly inferior thereby to some of his contemporaries,—to Henri de Mesmes, who could recite Homer from one end to the other, and also to La Boëtie, who had translated into French the *Œconomics* of Xenophon. But he had a thorough knowledge of the Latin tongue, which he had learnt from his birth as another mother language: "I understand it better than French." In his youth he had written a considerable quantity of Latin verse; in his manhood even, when he was strongly moved, Latin words were the first to come to his lips. He knew Italian, as he showed by writing in that language part of his Diary of Travel. He was acquainted with Spanish, and read assiduously the books published in Spain, which dealt with the discovery of the New World.

Some writers claim to have recognized in Montaigne the predominance of the Latin genius. This is not quite exact, since he disliked Cicero, and went to Greece to find his three greatest men: Homer, Alexander, and Epaminondas. And had he chosen a fourth, it would perhaps have been Socrates: "In speaking of him," says Emerson, "for once his cheek flushes, and his style rises to passion."

Montaigne had a "special fondness" for poetry. At school, at the age of seven or eight already, he read Ovid with transports of delight. He read the whole of Virgil, then Terence, then Plautus, without a pause. He has been reproached wrongly with a preference for the literature of the Roman Decadence. It is true that he esteemed Lucan, but he placed in the front rank, and far above him, Virgil, Lucretius, Horace, and Catullus, not to mention Terence and Martial. He quotes Lucretius oftenest; he admires Virgil most, especially in the *Georgics*, "the most finished work in poetry," and in the fifth book of the *Æneid*, "the most perfect of all."

The historians, the philosophers, and the moralists were also among his favourite authors. He took little pleasure in reading the orators; and although he says of Cicero that "no man ever equalled his eloquence," he thought his writings "tedious"; he goes so far as to say that he finds in them nothing

but "wind." He read Tacitus over and over with delight, and "was wont to give Cæsar special praise." But the books which he kept ever at hand were, before all others, Seneca and Plutarch; Plutarch especially, "our Plutarch," since he had assumed a French garb in the translation of Amyot, to whom Montaigne gave the palm over all other French writers.

"We ignorant men might have given ourselves up for lost, if the translation of Plutarch had not raised us from the mire."

Among other reasons why "Plutarch is his man," he gives the following, to wit: that his work is composed of unconnected pieces; you can "leave him whenever you please; he does not compel you to long and assiduous labour." Is that not also one of the reasons to which the *Essays* owe their success and their popularity?

One of the distinctive features of Montaigne's character is curiosity, a curiosity which descends to old wives' gossip. He has a fondness for anecdotes, for small details, far more, perhaps, than for general ideas. He collects the tittle-tattle of his immediate neighbourhood, of Toulouse, of Bergerac, as well as that of the writers of Rome and Athens. In the towns through which he passes he picks up the stories and tales which are current.

For those who would know Montaigne intimately, his Diary of Travel is a document worth studying. In the *Essays*, though he hates to be artificial, he is nevertheless an author, composing his features before a mirror. In his notes of travel, hurriedly jotted down from day to day, he shows himself "naked," as he said, and often in an unexpected light. Travelling, indeed, with its surprises, and the novelty of the sights which it presents to the eyes, gives rise to many fresh impressions; it vivifies faculties which the routine of ordinary life had left inactive. In Italy, Montaigne discloses to us how much his soul, in spite of all his protestations, was open to new influences, and with what ease it adapted itself to foreign customs. His was an universal soul, open to everything, ready for anything, more receptive even than learned; a cosmopolitan soul, so to speak, — cosmopolitan even as regarded the table, since he regretted not having brought his "chef" with him, in order to have him learn Italian cookery.

Montaigne's journey was no doubt a satisfaction afforded to his taste for exploration and discovery: "Our life here below is a quest after Truth; the world is a school for inquiry." But his journey was undertaken especially in quest of health; it was a medical pilgrimage from one hot spring to

another. Do not mention glory to him, or wealth or power: "Let me have health, by the grace of God!" His halts in Rome or Florence, to view the masterpieces of art, are shorter than his sojourn at the mineral station Della Villa, near Lucca, to try to regain the physical strength which is leaving him.[1] It is true that with his customary irony he jeers at the pretended virtues of those miraculous waters, "which cure all diseases"; but he uses them, nevertheless, and even overdoes it. Wherever there is a spring, without stopping to inquire about the nature of its waters, he hastens to it, bathes and drinks; he drinks immoderately, frantically, up to nine glasses a day at Plombières, seven glasses at Baden or at Lucca. . . .

"How little industrious I am!" Montaigne used to say. Must we then tax him with laziness? Yes, if laziness consists in a dislike for regular work, in the avoidance of all painful effort. — Of the game of chess he used to say, "I hate it, because it requires too much effort for a game." — No, if it is true that the ever active, ever alert and inquisitive mind of a man who loved travelling because he found

[1] Montaigne had also frequented the mineral springs of France, Bagnères de Bigorre, Eaux-Chaudes, Dax, etc. Cf. the study by Dr. Constantin James: *Montaigne, ses voyages aux eaux minérales*, Paris, 1859.

in it a continual "exercitation," cannot be charged with laziness.

Would it be any fairer to reproach him with having been nothing but an egotist? Here again we might plead either for or against, on the authority of Montaigne's own declarations. His advocate might quote for the defence the passages in the *Essays*, where he says that he is sociable to excess that can enjoy no pleasure unless he shares it with others. "My essential form," he said, "is a tendency to communication." He loved conversation as an exercise of the soul, apart from any other gain to be derived from it; and in conversation, he said, there should be naught but kindness, straightforwardness, cheerfulness, and friendship.

But, on the other hand, how many confessions of his show him solely concerned with his personal happiness, and convinced that the first duty of man is to be happy!

"A man should take to wife none but himself. . . . The greatest thing in the world is to know how to belong to one's self. . . . We should reserve a backshop for ourselves, entirely our own, entirely free, where we may establish our true liberty, where we may discourse and laugh, as if we had neither wife, nor children, nor possessions."

The state that Pascal realized in his life through

piety, mysticism, and love of God, — a state of renunciation of human affections and of withdrawal within himself, — Montaigne attained to that state by another road, through love of himself. "The *ego* is hateful," said Pascal; "the *ego* is our all," Montaigne would almost say. Starting from those contradictory principles, the two moralists arrive at the same practical conclusion: a sort of cenobitism of a religious type with the one, of a lay type with the other.

Montaigne's egotism is at bottom only a need of independence, carried to its extreme limit. He was determined to belong to himself. He hated being under any obligation, or being bound in any way. He hated above all servitude or subjection:—

"Princes do me enough good when they do me no harm; that is all I require of them."

He is the enemy of any assiduity, of any constraint: "I have a deadly hatred of being either bound or subject to any other than myself."

Domestic affairs, although less important than public business, are not less irksome to him; he calls them "servile duties." He wishes his happiness to depend on himself alone. He is so anxious to rid himself of all subjection, of all obligations, that sometimes he considered himself the gainer by the ingratitude of those to whom he had done a service,

because it dispensed him from fresh efforts to renew his good offices. While he admits that we should act while we are young, and give to the world "our more active and flourishing years," he thinks we should detach ourselves very soon, and early "take leave of the company."

"We have lived enough for others; let us live for ourselves at least during this remainder of life; and let us live to seek our ease."

Montaigne has another fault: he is not without vanity. He is proud of his armorial bearings, and swells with importance when he says, "My coat is azure tréflée or," etc.

He puts down in his diary, with great satisfaction, the civilities shown to him, as to a stranger of distinction, by the magistrates and notable men of the towns which he visits. In the inns where he takes his quarters, his escutcheon with his coat-of-arms must be affixed to the outer walls. He speaks with vanity of his ancestors, of his castle: "It is my birthplace and that of most of my ancestors," and he introduces them to us as gentlemen of an old stock, although they were nothing but rich fishmongers, according to Scaliger.[1]

The reader must not think, however, that it was

[1] Scaliger had been a pupil at the "Collége de Guyenne" a few years after Montaigne.

through vanity that he spoke so much of himself. It is without any underlying pride, and at the risk of compromising himself in the opinion of his readers, that he complacently gives us such minute information on his most intimate habits. He disobeys the maxim of the ancients, "Hide thy life." He gives us his physical portrait, speaks of his heavy mustache, of his medium stature and thickset body, adding that a handsome stature is the only beauty of men, and that he could lay no claim to it. But it is his moral self that he outlines. "What a foolish design Montaigne formed," says Pascal, "to go and picture himself!" We might retort, with Voltaire, that it was on the contrary "a charming design," and especially with Bernardin de Saint-Pierre, "When J.-J. Rousseau and Montaigne talk about themselves, I think they are talking about me." If Montaigne has met with so much favour, it is because almost all men recognize themselves in him, with their weaknesses and faults. He confessed to his with such easy frankness, that it seems to us that his example is an excuse for our own faults. In any case we cannot reproach him with showing himself in too favourable a light, with singing his own praises, since he is apt rather to jeer at himself: "I am nothing but a goose." He tells us, to our surprise, that he is completely wanting in memory;

his other faculties, he says, are of the most commonplace type. In his assumption of false modesty, he goes so far as to say, "Everything is coarse in me; there is a lack of grace and beauty."

If we are to believe him, he was but a dull boy at school, "both heavy and leaden, longer to learn a lesson, and less interested, not only than all his brothers, but even than all the children of his province"; and he means these words to apply both to the exercises of the body and to those of the mind.

Montaigne's moderation has often been praised, and it is certain that he was, before aught else, a believer in the golden mean. He is in this respect a typical example of the French spirit, of the old French spirit at least, of that exquisite sense of measure that we are gradually losing. He is moderate even in wisdom: —

"In my old age, I guard against temperance, as I did formerly against pleasure. Wisdom may be carried to excess, and requires moderation no less than folly. There may be excess in virtue, and it is no longer virtue, if any excess be in it."

Even when he feels most keenly, he keeps himself well in hand; he does not give himself entirely away; "he spares his will." He was voluptuous, it must be admitted, since he said, "If I find the smallest opportunity for pleasure, I grab at

it"; — and again, "I who have no other aim but to live and to enjoy life"; — and yet he strove to avoid temptation; he was on his guard against his passions. In his youth, he would fight against the progress of any love entanglement, when "he felt it taking too great a hold on him." He did not allow his feeling to burst into such a flame as would have held him "at its mercy." He curbed his will, as soon as it fastened too lustfully on any object. Not that he entered upon a direct struggle, for effort was painful to him, but he employed stratagem and cunning to get the better of his new-born passion, and created diversions in order to weaken the desire which threatened to tyrannize over him.

This wise spirit of moderation, which characterizes Montaigne, does not, however, go so far as to forbid him fits of anger and indignation, or strong hatred. Whatever wisdom study and meditation have instilled into him, his Gascon nature sometimes regains the upper hand with all its fierceness. He certainly shows little moderation when, before Molière, and with even more harshness, he showers sarcasm and invective upon medicine and doctors, "with their magistral fopperies and prosopopeyal gravity." — "The sun shines upon their successes and the earth hides their blunders. . . . They

killed off a friend of mine who was worth more than the whole lot of them." — He shows no moderation when, with scathing irony, he attacks pedantry and false science; when he calls philosophy "a clatter of brains." He shows least moderation of all when, allowing himself to be carried away, full sail, with a relentless vehemence for which Pascal admired him, he pitilessly takes human reason to task for its contradictions, uses its own weapons to crumple it up, revolts against its pretensions to attain to certainty, and places man "by special favour, on a level with beasts."

If, in his indictment of reason, Montaigne bases himself on the contradictions of human opinions: "There never were in this world two opinions alike;" — he might equally well have instanced, in support of his argument, the indecisions of his own mind and of his ever vacillating thought: —

"*Distinguo:* on this word I base the whole of my logic. . . . There are just as great disparities within ourselves as between ourselves and others. . . . Within myself will be found every contradiction: I am bashful and insolent, chaste and licentious, talkative and silent, hard-working and a dilettante [he does not say "lazy"], ingenious and dull, morose and good-natured, given to lying [when he referred, for instance, to the noble origin of his family] and

truthful, learned and ignorant, open-handed, stingy and prodigal."

And a few more characteristics might be added: sceptical and credulous, indifferent and passionate, stay-at-home and fond of travelling. . . . There are all sorts of men in Montaigne. He experienced every impulse of human nature. And what he said of other men is at least true of himself, "Each man bears within himself every attribute of humanity."

With Montaigne we must always be on our guard, and distrust even his most categoric affirmations. You have recorded one of his opinions, for which he has stated the strongest grounds. That, then, is his final verdict, you say, and you are about to congratulate him or to show that he is wrong. Do not be over-hasty, for if you turn the page, you will perhaps find a different, or even a contrary, conclusion on the same subject, and expressed with the same apparent conviction; you may even think it impossible that such contradictory ideas should have "come from the same shop." Nothing is more disconcerting than this uncertain course of an ever elusive thought, at the mercy of every wind, and which never finds its moorings.

Let us consider, however, that the fluctuating indecision of Montaigne's judgments springs from some of the qualities of his mind: first, from the

impetuosity of his imagination: "I love to see poetry skip and frolic on its way. . . . My own style and mind ramble about in a like manner;" and, secondly and especially, from his penetrating acuteness, his anxious curiosity, which makes him turn the same subject over and over in his mind, in order to see further into it. Let superficial minds pride themselves on never varying! When once they have got hold of a little bit of the truth, they stick to it, and will no longer depart from the shallow opinion they have formed after a rapid glance at the object they are studying. Montaigne, who goes below the surface, and right round an idea, who looks at every side of a fact and often returns to the same question, sees it in turn from every point of view. Montaigne's contradictions are in the main only the consequence of the very complexity of the questions he sets himself, the reflection of a world which is naught but "variety and dissimilarity." — "I contradict myself, but I do not contradict truth."

It is also possible that Montaigne's contradictions are due to the inconsistency of a character made up entirely of contrasts. He blamed those who are ever the slaves of the same inclination, and, in his expressive language, said that "he would rather approve of a soul built up of several platforms, such as might be raised to any height and taken to pieces

again." The suppleness of his mind verged on incoherence. In one place, he will say of Socrates that he is "the man most worthy to be known and given as an example to the world"; in another he will extol Alcibiades, and "his life, the richest that one could live." In the same chapter, he will talk, like a saint, "of divine Providence, which allows its Church to be tossed amid so many storms, in order to awaken pious souls"; and a few lines further on he will tell us at great length his own adventures with the ladies.

The inconsistency of Montaigne's character betrays also a certain levity. His imagination carried him away. "Most of us, in the workings of our mind, require lead rather than wings." — "A very little," he would say, "diverts us and leads us astray, because we are held down by very little." He was liable to fly away at any moment because he never clung strongly to anything. We are grieved to find that even when sunk in grief over the loss of La Boëtie, he immediately sought a diversion: —

"I once suffered a great grief; to divert my thoughts, I played at being in love. And love consoled me of the pain that friendship had caused me."

The *Essays* contain lessons for every age, as we have just seen, some of them not altogether edify-

ing. They contain excellent ones for old age. Now it should be noticed that Montaigne thought himself on the downward slope of old age when he was only forty years old. Thenceforward he was only "half a being," as he said. In 1582, at the age of fifty, while writing the third book of the *Essays*, he said, "I am shrivelling up and growing rancid." But what a cheerful and smiling old man he is! How he strives to maintain, amidst the infirmities of age and the harbingers of death, his good-humour and his gayety! God keep him from resembling those whose soul, as they grow old, "grows sour and musty!" As his memories roam through his long years of past happiness, he does not consume himself in vain regret: "I neither complain of the past, nor fear the future." He considers himself happy to have journeyed so far through life: "I have seen the young shoot and the flowers, and the fruit, and I now see the withering of the stock." No doubt the poor man, who, as he says, is "on the high road to ruin," does show some little regret for the days of his youth, so green and full of strength. Read, for instance, the chapter *On Some Verses of Virgil*, which would be better entitled: *The Art of Love*, or *Confessions of a Don Juan*.[1] If Montaigne finds

[1] Scaliger said that this chapter should have for a title *Coq-à l'âne*, or *Cock and Bull Stories*.

it somewhat difficult to take leave of the pleasures of youth, he starts in quest of others, and grows fond of good cheer: "I am learning to appreciate good wine and good sauces." Better still, he endeavours to remain youthful in mind; for it is the privilege of the mind to "regain possession of itself" and to rise above the attacks of age: "Let my mind remain green, and bloom, if it can, like mistletoe, on a dead tree. . . ." It is true that elsewhere he will confess sadly that old age "puts more wrinkles on our minds than on our faces."

He had no fear of death, of which he said, playing on the words, that it is "not the end, but the termination of life";[1] and elsewhere that it is "the last act of the play." Even "amidst the dances and games" of his youth, he already thought of death. One of his admirers, Justus Lipsius, mistook not when he wrote to Mlle. de Gournay, — begging her to look upon him thenceforth "as her brother," — that their adoptive father "had no doubt greeted death with that cheerfulness which was natural to him." Indeed, it is very surprising that the idea of death should present itself so often to Montaigne's mind, like a haunting obsession. He constantly returns to it, not to tremble, but to "grow familiar with it." — "Let us have nothing so often in our

[1] Non le *but*, mais le *bout* de la vie.

minds as death." He wishes, he says, "to be reconciled to death, to make friends with it." His sufferings help him to prepare for it, to go through what we might call the education of death. He notes down with the greatest minuteness what his impressions had been, one day that he had fainted after a fall from his horse; and he concludes from this semi-experience that the passage from life to death is perhaps not so painful as people imagine.

"Perhaps death is not worth all the trouble I take, all the preparations I make, all the assistance I call up and collect in order to bear that ordeal. I can depart, when it pleases God, without regretting anything in this world."

What he hopes for is a sudden death: "Death is all the better for being swift." It is then, he says almost light-heartedly, only a difficult quarter of an hour to go through. He would not mind dying on horseback. If he had lived in our times, death in a motor-car would have been quite to his taste. Being an epicure, and fond of his ease even in death, he would fain die gently, without sadness, far from the honest tears of relatives, and of the feigned demonstrations of grief of false friends.

How can we wonder that Pascal, a Christian, who never contemplates death and its mystery without quaking, is indignant with a philosopher who awaits

it almost with indifference, and who would "die basely, unresistingly, like a pagan"? Montaigne's feelings with regard to death are "horrible," says Pascal.[1] No, they are those of a man nobly resigned to the common law, — those of a man who hopes to die as he lived, like a sage, master of himself; who sees his last moments drawing nigh, not only undisturbed, but without "care," without anxiety, and who continues "the course of his life even unto death."

Where Pascal is right, is when he observes that amid Montaigne's reflections on death, there is hardly a thought given to the hereafter. With regard to immortality, no doubt, as on all other religious questions, the author of the *Essays* professes the Roman Catholic faith. But at heart, regarding that future life which he hardly ever mentions, had he any definite assurance, any settled opinion? The answer is doubtful. He quotes, without comment, La Boëtie's dying words: "I am going, I am certain of it, to find God and the abode of the blessed. . . ." And likewise, in his eulogy of Julian the Apostate, "that man so great and so rare" — the censors of the Roman Inquisition took him to task for these words of praise, and

[1] Pascal was almost as angry with him for having expressed doubts regarding the certainty of geometry.

invited him to "reclothe" this passage, — he notes, without adding a word, the fact that Julian "had a strong faith in the eternity of souls." And again, he will say of those who sacrifice the care of our present existence to the thought of their future destiny: "That opinion is absurd, which holds our present life in contempt. . . ." What conclusion are we to come to, but that the immortality of the soul was for Montaigne a problem to which he affixed a note of interrogation, and to which he applied his famous "What do I know?"; that it was at the most vague and uncertain hope?

"O what a bold faculty is hope, which, in mortal man, and in a moment, does not shrink from usurping the Infinite, Immensity, nay, Eternity itself! . . ."

Montaigne's religion has been the subject of much discussion. Large volumes, — such as that of Abbé de la Bouderie, — have been written on his Christian faith. Others, readers of Châteaubriand, have said that the *Essays* might be called, "*The Genius of Paganism.*" Whom are we to listen to? What is beyond doubt is that Montaigne bears himself outwardly as a perfectly orthodox Roman Catholic. He partakes of the Sacraments; he is devout, he makes the sign of the Cross "whenever there is occasion"; for instance, "when he yawns." At Eastertide he receives the sacrament at Loreto, in

Italy;[1] but vainglorious as ever, he would have us know that he receives it in a private chapel, "which every one may not do." He repeats the Lord's Prayer: a prayer "dictated by the very mouth of God," and indeed the only one which he used. He has a priest called to his death-bed. And again he declares that he submits humbly to the Catholic church, "in which he is dying and into which he was born." He bows his head before the divine will.

"It is enough that a Christian should believe that all things come from God, and receive them in the full acknowledgment of His divine and inscrutable wisdom."

It was Man in the state of nature that the Jansenists anathematized in Montaigne. And yet it often happened that he called upon divine grace, and upon the assistance of God, to sustain him in his human weakness. Pascal would have subscribed without demur to this passage of the *Essays:* —

"Oh! what a vile and abject thing is man, if he do not rise above humanity! And he will thus rise, if God, by special favour, will lend him his aid."

But neither those orthodox declarations, nor

[1] At Loreto, Montaigne had the following "ex-voto," or votive tablet, engraved: *Michael Montanus, Gallus Vasco, eques regii ordinis; Francisca Cassaniana uxor, Leonora Montana filia unica.*

those religious practices, are a guarantee that Faith was in him. Montaigne, Pascal said, "acts as a pagan"; he also thought as a pagan. His Christianity was all on the surface; an outward submission to the use and wont of the country of his birth. I am a Christian, he said, as I belong to Périgord. He is a Roman Catholic, rather than a Christian; a philosopher rather than a Roman Catholic. It should be noted that though he quotes much, he rarely quotes the Gospel, and never speaks of Christ. A man can be no great believer in revelation when he writes: —

"Whatever we learn, it is a mortal hand which presents it to us, a mortal hand which accepts it."

He is fond of relating miraculous occurrences, but he observes, not without irony, that miracles are invariably withheld from his sight; and he expressly affirms that the order and course of Nature can be disturbed by no intervention. In his relations with the church, he seems to adopt more or less the same attitude as he does toward medicine. He heaps upon doctors his most stinging epigrams, and yet, having reached the end of his diatribe, he bows low to them: "However, I hold doctors in honour. . . . When I am sick, I call them to me; I pay them, like other people. . . ." Yes; but he adds that "his judgment must needs be marvellously out of joint, if ever he should be-

lieve in their power and in the efficacy of their drugs."

It is difficult to gather exactly what Montaigne thought of the Reformation. In the perpetual oscillation of his judgment, at one time he declares that posterity will celebrate it for having fought against error and vice, for having filled the world with piety, humility, obedience, and all manner of virtues; and anon he scoffs at the efforts which the Protestants are making to spread the knowledge of the Bible by means of translations: "A strange people, who think they have brought the Word of God within the understanding of the masses, because they have put it into popular language!" It remains certain that his attitude toward the religious quarrels of his time was the same as in political questions: he kept aloof and remained neutral; he did not follow the example of those among his own brothers who had been converted to Protestantism.[1]

"Let those who in these latter days have so earnestly laboured to frame and establish unto us an exercise of religion and service of God, so contemplative and immaterial, wonder nothing at all if

[1] Montaigne was the third child of a large family, — seven or eight boys or girls. His two elder brothers were already dead when he was born.

some be found who think it would have escaped and mouldered away between their fingers."

A man "of good faith," but of little faith, Montaigne, in his inmost soul, remained outside any religious confession. The wisdom to which he aspires is a human wisdom, which should be "neither produced nor disquieted by religion." He wishes to live the human life, in conformity with his natural condition. He is the true forerunner of modern freethinkers. He has the intuition of the advent of a lay and rational system of ethics, "sprung from nature," and which shall feel "strong enough to stand unaided, born and rooted within ourselves, of the seed of universal reason, which is to be found within every unperverted man." He eliminates the supernatural, and claims to find within himself "as much doctrine as he needs." Sainte-Beuve was not wrong when he said that a chapter might be written on *the dogmatism of Montaigne.* But this dogmatism does not exceed the limits of practical reason. It is a doctrine of life, which he bases either on the precepts and examples of ancient wisdom, or on conscience, of which he said that "its grip is tighter and more severe than that of a tribunal of judges." But in the domain of pure reason, Montaigne is indifferent and sceptical. He sings the same song as Pascal on the impotence of human

reason, but he sings it to another tune, and the *finale* is not the same. In vain are we reminded that Montaigne said grace before meat and heard mass in his bedroom. It is none the less true that in the apartment above, in the sanctuary of his library, he had caused to be engraved on the rafters of the ceiling, as if to have them constantly hovering over him, fifty-six maxims, which are as a summary of his philosophy and the essence of scepticism: "Vanity, uncertainty, error. . . . — Man is but a vessel of clay, a dim shadow, mud and ashes. — I lay down no law; I do not understand; I suspend judgment, etc. . . ." The conclusion of his intellectual quest is the "I know not" of Socrates, with the addition of a note of interrogation, "What do I know?"

II

Montaigne's Pedagogy

Montaigne is no pedagogue of the people; alone, in the sixteenth century, the men of the Reformation took any thought of popular education. The plan that he puts before us, in the celebrated chapter *Of the Institution and Education of Children,* was conceived only for a son of noble family, happily situated and of exalted birth, his little neighbour at the castle of Gurson.[1] His theme was the education, under the guidance of a carefully chosen "governor" or tutor, of a young nobleman intended by his condition for a life of ease, and perhaps of idleness. But as of this little nobleman Montaigne wants to make a *man,* his views often extend beyond the limited horizon of a castle-education, and many of his maxims are applicable to children of all conditions and of all times. Moreover, Montaigne's

[1] This *Essay,* Chapter XXIV of Book I, is dedicated to Diane de Foix, Countess de Gurson, with reference to her child, who, for that matter, was not yet born. Montaigne, with the high spirits of a Southerner, prophesies that this child about to be born must needs be a boy: "for, madam, you are too generous to begin with other than a man-child. . . ."

impetuous imagination often carried him far beyond the limits within which he seemed to have intended to keep his reflections; so that while he deals with a private and individual education, it often happens that he touches on pedagogical questions of general import. – Lastly, it is not only in the one chapter dedicated to Countess de Gurson that Montaigne discusses education; his whole work is strewn with digressions in which he gives us his own views, or else criticises the teaching and disciplinary methods then in use. "I am fond of reverting to this question of the 'ineptness' of our education."

Montaigne, who is averse to any set opinions, harbours no superstitious belief in the virtues of education. He does not look upon it as an infallible and all-powerful means of success, nor does he believe that the future of the individual depends upon it alone. To the best professional pedagogues he opposes "those good schoolmasters which are Nature, Youth, and Health." He recognizes the strength of physical heredity, and that also of moral predestination.

"We bear within ourselves the impulses, not only of the corporal being, but also of the thoughts and inclinations of our parents. . . . Natural inclinations may be helped and strengthened by education, but they can hardly be changed or overcome.

I have seen in my time a thousand natures fly to virtue or to vice, in opposition to the discipline they were subjected to. There is no one who, if he hearkens unto himself, will not discover within him a form which is his own, a master-form, which fights against education. . . ."

At every moment the expressions "a well-begotten soul," "an ill-begotten mind," recur under his pen; and he quotes himself in proof of the action of natural and hereditary influences: —

"What good there is in me I owe to the accident of my birth; I hold it neither from laws, nor precepts, nor any other apprenticeship."

If he admits that there are limits to the effects of education, he is far, however, from undervaluing its importance. "Who is there but sees that in a state everything depends on this education and nurturing?" And consequently he would view with favour the intervention of the State, and even its sovereign authority, in the matter of education. He laments that the Spartans and the Cretans were the only nations who "committed the care of youth to the law"; and quite forgetting that it is for a mother of good birth that he is drawing up a plan of domestic education, he declares that it is great folly to leave education under the authority of the parents, "however foolish and wicked they may be."

Montaigne is ever inspired by antiquity, by Plato, Socrates, by Plutarch especially. He could not, like Rabelais, give himself the pleasure of reading in the original text "the *Opera moralia* of Plutarch and the fine Dialogues of Plato." And yet it is by calling to his aid his memories of the Classics, the "pedagogisms" of Plato and the Socratic method, that, after Rabelais, and with as much heat as the latter, he makes a violent onslaught on the "inept" education of his time. Whoever is acquainted with his invectives against pedantry, vain erudition, false learning, and also against the barbarous discipline of the Middle Ages, will no longer be tempted to take him for a sceptic, a cold and indifferent witness of the evil the existence of which he recognizes and condemns. On this subject, he is no longer content to smile and to jest; he waxes indignant, levels accusations, is carried away by his anger. He finds no words stinging enough to scourge pedants and their "asinine" and overweening presumption, to break away from empty rhetoric, from syllogistic dialectics: —

"I would rather be a good cook than a good rhetorician. . . . I would rather have my son, if I had one, learn to talk in taverns than in schools of rhetoric. . . . Whoever acquired reason through logic? Where are its fine promises? Does one hear

more rambling nonsense between gossiping fish-wives than in the public disputations of dialecticians? It is *baroco* and *baralipton* which have so besotted and befogged their devotees."

Montaigne's pedagogy is then before aught else a protest and a reaction against the faults of mediæval schools, and also against the abuses which the literary fanaticism of the Renaissance had brought into fashion. His pedagogical doctrine — for he had one — is already apparent in his criticisms. It is a counterthrust of the new spirit, of the spirit of light and liberty, against the long enslaving of the obscure ages which had proscribed gentleness in discipline and independence in teaching. It is also, before Rousseau, a return to Nature, that is to say, in Montaigne's words, to what is "general, common, and universal," to what is human, in short. Montaigne disowns anything "which is supported only by the hoary beard and the wrinkles of custom"; he refers everything "to truth and reason." He is bent on following "the fine open road traced for us by Nature," from which the importunate subtlety of a false philosophy turns us aside by "enslaving our natural freedom."

"We cannot go wrong in following Nature. The sovereign precept is to conform to it. . . . It is unreasonable that the art of man should take prece-

dence of our great and powerful mother Nature. . . . Wherever Nature shines in its purity, it is marvellous how it puts to shame our vain and frivolous enterprises."

Montaigne is undoubtedly the first who brought into prominence this truth, which became after him one of the commonplaces of classical pedagogy, that before that specialized education which turns out a professional man, a scientist, or a scholar, there is, there ought to be, a general education which makes the man. He explains this humorously under the form of an anecdote: —

"Being once on my journey toward Orleans, it was my chance to meet upon that plain that lyeth on this side Clery, with two masters of arts travelling toward Bordeaux, about fifty paces one from another; far off behind them I descried a troop of horsemen, their master riding foremost, who was the Earl of Rochefoucault. One of my servants inquiring of the first of those masters of arts, what gentleman he was that followed him; supposing my servant had meant his fellow-scholar, for he had not yet seen the Earl's train, answered pleasantly, 'He is no gentleman, but a grammarian, and I am a logician.' Now, we that contrariwise seek not to frame a grammarian, nor a logician, but a complete gentleman, let us give them leave to misspend their

time; we have elsewhere, and somewhat else of more import to do."

The essential element of this general education consists in the education of judgment, and that is the culminating point of Montaigne's pedagogy.

If the scholar has learned to judge, the supreme end of education will have been reached. What, then, is meant by judging?

To judge is first of all to think for one's self, to hold opinions which are our own; it is to inquire after truth through an effort of personal reflection.

To judge is to think rightly, to see clearly in all questions which may present themselves, thanks to the clear understanding that pertains to an unwarped mind.

To judge well, lastly, is to be able and ready to act well. For correct judgment keeps one free from the errors and illusions which are the source of evil actions. Soundness of thought calms and appeases passions. To think for one's self and to think rightly is already to have acquired moral strength.

On the first of these points, that is, independence of thought, Montaigne explains his views as forcibly as the author of the *Discourse on Method* will do a century later: —

"Learn to think freely, and not to follow lamely on the track of another; make bold to shake ridicu-

lous foundations upon which false opinions are built. . . . Truth and reason are common to all."

Montaigne himself gives the example of this liberty of thought; he does not allow himself to be ensnared and blinded by the authority of present custom, nor by fashion, which "topsyturvies" the understanding of his contemporaries. He inveighs with inexhaustible vigour against purely verbal education, that which makes no appeal to personal judgment, and which is content to stamp upon the memory knowledge that the mind has neither tested nor examined, and that it does not assimilate.

"We are like unto him who, being in need of fire, should go and beg some at his neighbour's, and finding there fire in plenty, should stop there to warm himself, without remembering to bring any home. — Even as the birds which feed their young carry the grain in their beaks without tasting it, thus do our pedants purloin science from books, which they in no way digest, but merely keep on their lips, ever ready to part with it again and scatter it to the winds."

Learning is of use only to him who has been able to assimilate it, to espouse it, and to make really his own the opinions which one borrows from others. The work of the mind should resemble that of bees, who fly hither and thither sucking the flowers, but with their plunder they make honey, after which it

is no longer either thyme or marjoram. . . . What is important is not the extent of one's knowledge, but one's power of reflection; it is the strength of a well-developed reason, which weighs and scrutinizes the motives of its beliefs and shapes its opinions freely: "The soul is not a vessel that requires filling; it is a hearth to be warmed." — "I would rather shape my soul than furnish it."

Nor indeed would it avail that our judgment should be our own, if it should prove to be false. Rectitude of mind is one of the foremost intellectual virtues. Better a well-fashioned head than a well-filled one. If, says Montaigne, I like to subject to "inquisition," that is to say, to examination, "the continual variety of human affairs, it is that our judgment may become the more enlightened and the stronger." He does, personally, everything he can to moderate the rash impetuosity of his own judgment. He recommends prudence, and is mindful of it himself. He reminds us that "each thing has a hundred faces"; and that it beseems us, therefore, to analyze, to distinguish, and also to pause, in any delicate subject, when we feel that we cannot proceed, "sounding the ford," as he says, "and if we find it too deep for our stature, keeping on the bank"; that is to say, abstaining from formulating an opinion.

Judgment, then, is the critical spirit which ob-

serves, reasons, and concludes; it is the understanding which disentangles truth from error. But it is also the faculty which distinguishes good from evil, and which regulates our manner of living. Montaigne does not keep judgment apart from moral conscience. It is that we may become better men that he would have us better able to judge. He constantly associates those two points of view. He will say: "This will make men better advised and more virtuous." His chief reproach against the education of his day is that it leaves both our understanding and our conscience empty of content. The Middle Ages subordinated all teaching to theology; Montaigne subordinates it to ethics. True education tends toward action. "My science is to learn how to live." He never ceases to expatiate on this subject, and he repeats under every form that the advantage we derive from study is that we become better and wiser. If he is so violent in his attacks on book-learning, it is because the latter commits the mistake of neglecting practical and moral education.

"Behold this man, snuffling, blear-eyed, and unwashed, rising after midnight from his study. Think you that he is seeking, among his books, how he may become better, more contented, and wiser? Alas, no! . . ."

Could Montaigne point to his own example to extol the theory that looks upon moral education and the cultivation of judgment as one, and to guarantee its efficacy? He did indeed exercise his judgment, "that universal tool," with rare independence. He brings it to bear on every possible subject, in his delightful chats with his reader. He would descant on military tactics, on the wars of Scipio and Hannibal, of Francis I and Charles V, with as much ease and assurance as on joy and sadness, love and friendship. He admired the military genius of Cæsar, and his prodigious intelligence; but he did not hesitate to judge him severely for destroying the Roman Republic, thereby "rendering his memory abominable to all good men." He never abdicated his liberty of thought, faithful to the proud motto: "Judgment must everywhere maintain its rights." But was he "better and wiser" on this account? He tells us he was.

"I have seen my friends sometimes consider that I had the advantage of them in courage and patience, when my only advantage was in judgment and opinion."

In his fits of stoicism, it is to his understanding that he appeals for help to bear with misfortune; he goes so far as to say that "a man of understanding loses nothing of himself, in the disasters of his country, in the ruin of his family."

Thanks to his judgment, he claims to have partly escaped the sufferings which afflict most men: "For the world looks upon several things as horrible, which I contemplate more or less with indifference."

More than once he put a curb to his passions, he resisted impulses of anger and hatred, by seeking for a point of support in his intelligence alone: —

"I am but little given to those propensities which arise within us without any guidance or intervention of our judgment."

Yes; but again he will say, "My affections change, but not my judgment." Is this not an admission that sensibility does not always depend on judgment, that it asserts itself without, and in spite of, our judgment? And he writes also, "Whatever excesses I ever indulged in, I condemned; for my judgment was not infected by them." Does he not then recognize that a sound judgment, even though it preserves us from errors of thought, does not always preserve us from errors of conduct? What does it matter if error condemns them, when it does not prevent them?

Howbeit, and since judgment is, according to Montaigne, the dominant faculty of every well-trained man,[1] let us examine by what means he

[1] Full of Montaigne's teachings, Mlle. de Gournay said: "Judgment raises men above beasts, Socrates over men, and God over Socrates."

intends us to acquire this most precious of all qualities. What, in short, is his practical pedagogy?

Here, Montaigne is an excellent guide, who substitutes a natural, living, and free education to the artificial and abstract, mechanical and servile instruction of the Middle Ages. He seems to unwrap, one by one, the bands in which scholasticism had enfolded the human mind; the mummy, immobilized in the cloths of syllogistic reasoning, seems to come back gradually to life and freedom.

What he desiderates in the first place, is that the child's initiative should be allowed full play. The tutor shall allow his pupil to "trot on in front of him," in order to judge of his natural pace, and to be able thereafter to accommodate himself to it. Whereupon some critics exclaim, not without injustice, "Education after the fashion of Montaigne resolves itself into nothing." [1] Do they wish, then, to return to that tyrannical education which takes no account of a child's bent, which oppresses him under the yoke of uncompromising didactic methods, leaving no opening, no outlet for natural forces? Montaigne is right, when he asks that the pupil shall be accustomed to think for himself, and allowed opportunity to speak. He is right when he pro-

[1] Cf. M. Émile Faguet's Preface (p. xv) to the posthumous work of Guillaume Guizot: *Montaigne, Études et fragments.*

scribes instruction which appeals solely to the memory. Although he recognizes that memory is a precious tool "without which judgment can scarcely perform its duties," he nevertheless points to the fact that "an excellent memory very often goes with a feeble judgment." It is not through learning by rote fine maxims, "that have been stamped upon his memory, to be fired off like oracles," that the child will achieve his intellectual and moral education. His reflection and intelligence should be appealed to early,—as early as possible. That his understanding may become active, it must needs be given full independence:—

"Let judgment preserve its free gait; we render it slavish and timid if we deny it any initiative."

Therefore, we must not overload it with formal teaching; we must not imitate those loquacious educators who do not allow their pupils time to look around them, and who bawl facts into their ears "as if they were pouring them into a funnel."

It is through observation, through personal and direct experience, by frequenting men and looking at things, that the child will first develop his judgment. The commerce of men is marvellously fitted to form the mind. We know what pleasure Montaigne derived from it. He loved to converse, to discourse, and to "confer," on condition, however,

that he might choose his company. "The incomparable author of the *Art of Conferring*," as Pascal said, saw in this art "the most fruitful exercise of our mind"; and one that he considered pleasanter than any other action in life. In an animated and familiar conversation he found more excitement for the mind than in the "languid exertion of reading." — "We should live with those who are alive," he would exclaim. And so he invited children themselves to mingle in the conversations and discussions of the people about them, to take a share in them, at the risk of having to acknowledge with good grace any mistake due to their ignorance. He invited them to listen with attentive ear to all that was said around them. The malice of a page, the foolish act of some valet, a table utterance, all these offer opportunity for instruction. Everything should be to an awakening judgment an occasion for reflection and study: "The child should probe the ability of each one: cow-herd, mason, or passer-by. . . ." That was what Montaigne did on his own account: after spending long hours in his library in holding commerce with the greatest minds of antiquity, he took pleasure in conversing familiarly with a carpenter or a joiner.

To observe things is not less profitable than to converse with men: —

"Let a child's fancy be encouraged toward a seemly interest in all things. Whatever striking objects there may be around him, let him see them: a building, a fountain, a man, the ground of an ancient battle, the spot where Cæsar or Charlemagne passed. Those are all very pleasant things to learn. . . ."

The spirit of the intuitive method, of object lessons, that which will animate Froebel, Pestalozzi, has already breathed upon Montaigne. Far from isolating the child in the study of the past, he throws him into real life, brings him into contact with realities. He expects much from that gradual education which results from the "frequentation of the world," which proceeds spontaneously from the circumstances, the surroundings, the environment amid which the pupil is placed. His knowledge shapes itself, not abstract, ready-made, and passive, out of a book reeled off by heart, but living and active out of the facts which he observes and interprets. And take note that Montaigne is not content with a superficial and lightly made observation. He would seem, at times, to be the precursor of Bacon, and to be laying the first foundations of experimental logic, — when he says, for instance, "It is not enough to number one's experiences, they should be weighed and set in order."

Montaigne is far from thinking, as Rousseau was to do, of excluding books from education. But he would have them used with discretion, in moderation, and always with a view to forming the judgment. What he is fighting against is not the book, but the book learned by rote, the book read without criticism.

Reading, moreover, is an occupation which, carried to excess, may become as painful as any other; if, in the commerce of books, we should lose our gaiety and health, "our chief assets," let us not hesitate, but give up our reading! As for him, he likes only two kinds of books: pleasant books which amuse and "tickle" him, or else those which comfort and advise him, "for the better arrangement of his life and death." He does not say which books he would propose to put into children's hands, but at least he teaches us how those which the master has chosen ought to be read. Reading must exercise, not our memory, but our judgment. We should ask for an account, not only of the words of the text, but of "their meaning and substance." Such maxims may appear trite at the present day, but, at the time of Montaigne, they were something quite new. How often we have heard repeated after him — but the utterance originated with him — that in the study of history, the explanation of the

events, and a reasoned acquaintance with the characters, are of more importance than dates or facts!

"Let the master bethink himself whereto his charge tendeth, and imprint not so much in his scholar's mind the date of the ruin of Carthage, as the manners of Hannibal and Scipio; not so much where Marcellus died, as why it was unworthy of his duty that he should have died there; let him teach him not so much to know histories as to judge of them."

"Exercise the judgment," such is the constant refrain of Montaigne's pedagogy. But an enlightened and healthy judgment should not only rule over our intelligence, it should become a law unto our actions. Wherefore the child must be schooled in philosophy, that is to say, in ethics. "Philosophy teaches us how to live." Its study is of supreme importance, and is also chronologically the earliest teaching that Montaigne presents to the child. "Among the liberal arts," he says, — forgetting that philosophy or ethics figured neither in the Trivium nor in the Quadrivium, — "let us begin by the art which makes us free," that is, by philosophy. "Let the first discourses in which we steep the child's understanding be those which regulate his morals and his good sense." And foreseeing the objection that children are too young, and that it

is difficult to put before a dawning intelligence lessons that it would be incapable of understanding, he endeavours to prove that "philosophy has simple discourses," and that a child is able to understand such "from the time when he returns from nurse, much better than he can learn to read or write."

"It is philosophy that teacheth us to live, and infancy as well as other ages may plainly read her lessons in the same. . . . Philosophy hath discourses whereof infancy as well as decaying old age may make good use."

We may treat with scepticism those somewhat rash affirmations. Montaigne himself is conscious of the difficulty. Hence he seeks means to smooth the somewhat rugged road along which he is leading the child. The tutor shall hint at the moral lesson rather than teach it. This lesson will be mingled with every action, every event of the child's life; —we seem already to be listening to Rousseau—"it will insinuate itself without making itself felt." Therefore, no teaching of doctrine, no formal lessons. Montaigne realizes that to guide us through life, to lead us toward action, a moral doctrine, be it ever so well understood, would not suffice, and that it must go hand in hand with practice. "It is through practice that we must exercise and train our soul, that may bear itself as we wish." The child, to be-

come a righteous man, must go through a personal apprenticeship to virtue. It would be absurd, says Montaigne, if Le Paluël, and Pompée, "these fine dancers of my early days," should think "to teach us their steps and capers by inviting us to look on, without stirring from our place"; and it would be equally ridiculous to imagine that "one can train the understanding without setting it into motion." Let no one say, then, that Montaigne failed to appreciate the value of action, the necessity for exercising the will, and the influence of habit.

"Men cannot be made brave and warlike on the spot, through a stirring harangue, any more than one becomes a musician of a sudden through hearing a good song. In either case proficiency must be acquired through a long apprenticeship, through long and constant training."

The foundations of moral life, for Montaigne, are neither the authority of religion, nor faithful obedience to the doctrine of such or such a philosopher, but personal effort. He tried to form his own life, to guide it, to protect it from the vicissitudes of fortune. "All my efforts have tended to the fashioning of my life; such has been my trade, such the work I have achieved." He complains that the majority of men are unable to draw up a well-thought-out plan, a settled design, for their conduct; they

resolve on their course of action day by day, "from hand to mouth." The ideal that he conceived for himself is perhaps shabby, inferior, marred by selfishness, but after all, he had an ideal, and a plan of conduct.

For the evolving of such a plan, he recommends to others what he practised himself: meditation, self-communion: —

"Look within yourselves, know yourselves, hold on to yourselves. Your mind, your will, which you are spending elsewhere, bring it back within yourself. . . ."

Pécaut, the educator of conscience, would have applauded. It is true that "holding on to one's self," when it is Montaigne who is speaking, is no guarantee of a very firm point of support, or of a very stable foundation. But at least it proves that the author of the *Essays* sought within himself, and not in some exterior authority, the foundation of his moral life. We must, he says, "establish within us a pattern by which we can gauge our actions." And again: —

"Let man govern himself, respecting and fearing his reason and his conscience, so that he cannot without shame stumble in their presence. . . . There is a peculiar satisfaction in well-doing which causes us to rejoice within ourselves; this is the only reward which never fails us. . . . We must fol-

low the straight road for the sake of its straightness, for the satisfaction which a well-regulated conscience derives from well-doing."

How, after reading such words, would it be possible still to maintain, as some people have done, that Montaigne "administered anæsthetics to men's consciences"?

Montaigne is so thoroughly convinced that philosophy, "which fashions judgment and morals," ought to be the principal lesson of childhood, that he despairs of educating those who should show no taste for it. If my disciple, he says, takes no pleasure in it, if he would rather listen to a fable than to some wise observation, if he prefers dancing to fighting, "I see no other remedy but to establish him as confectioner in some good town, were he even the son of a duke." And even, thinking he has not said enough against the child who is rebellious to moral teaching, as if taken with a fit of rage, he writes in the margin of this passage, in a later edition, "Let his tutor twist his neck early, if there be no witnesses! . . ." On that day Montaigne really lacked moderation.

After all, there is perhaps no reason to be astonished that Montaigne should consider the study of moral philosophy as accessible to children, and even as more intelligible to them than "a tale from

Boccaccio." He makes it so amiable, so playful, so "frolicsome." On the one hand he docks philosophy of everything that is calculated to make it formal and forbidding: technical expressions and pedantic terminology. "It is quibblers who must bear the blame, if philosophy appears but a vain and fantastic name." On the other hand, he generally professes an amiable and easy-going moral doctrine, which is not hostile to pleasure; it loves life, beauty, glory, and health. Consequently, it would be as easy for the pupil to accomplish duty as it is for the master to teach its rules. "The reward of virtue lies therein, that it is so easy, useful, and pleasant to practise."

Never did Montaigne's fluctuating thought unconsciously abandon itself more to contradictions, to sudden changes of view, than in the successive definitions which he gives of morality and of virtue. Was it to crave forgiveness for these that he complained so often of his treacherous memory? But it is not from one chapter to another, it is in the same *Essay*, at a few lines' distance, that he contradicts himself without seeming to notice it. He has just said of the lofty virtue of Socrates that it was natural to him, that to practise it he had not had to fight with evil instincts, and he admires him for that spontaneous wisdom, to which nature had opposed

no obstacle. Now, a little further on, he writes: "Socrates used to admit to those who discerned in his countenance some inclination to vice, that such was, in truth, his natural propensity, but that he had cured it through self-discipline."

A more serious contradiction is that which brings epicureanism and stoicism into conflict within Montaigne himself. How often he has celebrated an easy and amiable virtue, which "preaches only feasting and good living, and constant merry-making." He is angry that virtue should be clothed in sable, "a foolish and ugly dress." He likes wisdom to be cheerful. He avoids "rigidity and austerity of living, and holds all surly countenances in suspicion." He hates those cross-grained and morose minds which ignore the pleasures of life. And smitten with real poetic fury, he sings, in a well-known passage, a hymn to the Virtue of his dreams: to "Virtue, who gloriously, as on a throne of majesty, sits sovereign, goodly, triumphant, lovely, equally delicious and courageous, professing herself to be an irreconcilable enemy to all sourness, austerity, fear, and compulsion; having Nature for her guide, Fortune and Voluptuousness for her companions," etc.[1] Montaigne grows intoxicated with his own words; similes and epithets shine and burst forth

[1] *Essays*, Book I, Chap. XXV.

in a magnificent flight of sparkling language. But how comes it that after discoursing on the "paths of wisdom, shady and flowery, and soft to tread on," the same philosopher changes his mind to the extent of writing that "virtue refuses to take ease for a companion"; that "this easy, soft, and gently sloping path, along which a naturally good inclination guides its steps," is not that of true virtue; and that in short the latter demands "a rugged and thorny path"? It is Zeno, whom he calls "the foremost man of the foremost philosophic school, and fit to teach all others," that Montaigne now takes for his guide. It is the virtue of the Stoics which he is extolling, that which "rings out something greater and more active," and to attain to which it is not enough "through a happy disposition, gently and peacefully to walk in the footsteps of reason."

We must not expect from Montaigne a complete and precise plan of studies, nor ask him for more than he promised us. He warned us himself that he would have but little to say on teaching properly so called, "forasmuch as he could add nothing of any moment to it." It is only by the way, and in few words, that he mentions any other studies than philosophy. And he commits the grave blunder of putting them off until the day when the child's

judgment shall have been formed. Then only shall he be taught "what is meant by logic, physics, geometry, rhetoric." Those are assuredly very short-sighted views. Montaigne forgets that those special studies, in a well-understood pedagogical system, can and ought to be the very instruments of the education of the mind; that they form an essential part of "mental gymnastics"; that "object lessons" and familiar talks on ethical subjects cannot suffice to enlighten the reason, and to stock the mind with the necessary knowledge; that the intelligence requires that more substantial nourishment which can only be provided by the general and abstract truths contained in the various literary and scientific subjects of education.

Montaigne has been reproached, not without reason, with having strangely restricted the part which science ought to play in education, and having given it too modest a place in his school programme. Nor would it be a sufficient excuse to urge that in his days science could hardly be said to exist. It was equally non-existent at the time of Rabelais, and yet the latter, in a prophetic vision of the future, put down on his programme, as if they had already accomplished their work, all the branches of natural science. No, we must admit that it is Montaigne's tendency — anxious as he is before aught else to

shape his pupil's moral nature — to despise pure science, that which affords no help, no rules, for our practical conduct in life, and which "often goes to useless lengths or useless depths in its considerations." It should be of no moment to us, he says, whether Copernicus is right or Ptolemy. Anything of the nature of a speculative problem interests him but little. We are "very simple" to teach our children the science of heavenly bodies, before the science of man. And yet, let us beware; it is especially false science, verbal learning, undigested erudition, which he attacks: —

"I love and honour learning as much as those who have it, and, put to its proper use, it is the most noble and powerful acquisition of man; but with regard to those (and their number is legion) who rely for their understanding on their memory, and who are helpless without their book-learning, I hate them, if I dare say so, rather more than stupidity itself. . . . Doctrine is a most useful accessory to a well-born soul; to another soul it may be pernicious and hurtful; . . . in some hands, it is a sceptre, in others a fool's bauble. . . ."

So that Montaigne's contemptuous indifference, his hostility, are directed less against science as such than against science ill-practised, and put to wrong uses in education. He gives it a place in his school

programme. Rabelais said to his pupil, "In short, let me see abysmal depths of science." Does not Montaigne express very much the same thing when he says, of the physical universe, "In short, I would have it be my scholar's book"? But even in this study of the universe, Montaigne continues to pursue his moral and practical ideal. If he asks that man should understand nature in general, it is that he may admire its "great and sovereign majesty," in order the better to realize what a small place he holds in it, and to understand that his ambitions should be in conformity with his humble destiny. The study of nature, like the frequentation of men, like the commerce of books, like all and every study, in short, should be but a school for judgment, and for moral judgment in the first place.

Montaigne, although so thoroughly conversant with Latin that the Latinist Muret "feared to tackle him," was one of the first to shake off the yoke of Latinism: "Greek and Latin are very fine things, no doubt, but we pay too dearly for their acquisition. . . ." We know how he had himself learned the Latin tongue. "Before the first unloosening of his tongue," he had been intrusted by his father to masters who spoke only Latin to him. The castle of Montaigne had become, so to speak, a small village university; and also a school of music, since musi-

cians were intrusted with the duty of preparing every morning a pleasant awakening for the child. Parents, valets, chambermaids even, every one around him jabbered in Latin. At six years of age he knew not a word of French, nor of the Périgord dialect. Is this method, which had made Latin Montaigne's mother tongue, the right one? Montaigne himself does not think so. On this point he does not allow the recollection of his own education to influence him; nay, perhaps his personal experience had taught him the drawbacks of the system, more ingenious than wise, which his father had imagined. At all events, he declares most emphatically that Latin should only be learned after French, and even after "modern" languages. "I should like, in the first place, to be thoroughly conversant with my own language and that of my neighbours."

The dead languages are therefore relegated to a secondary position. Hitherto, they have taken up too much time, and been studied too mechanically. Their study should be simplified and made easier, with a minimum of grammar. Montaigne had no love for grammarians. It was his boast that he himself had learned languages only by practice, without knowing the rules. "I know not what is meant by adjective, conjunctive, or ablative. . . ."

This lofty contempt for grammar was allowable

in a great writer, who created his own language. But the liberties which he takes, and to which he partly owes much that is natural or novel in his language, can evidently not be put before common men as models for imitation. His rhetoric is that of nature. Art and especially artifice are rigidly proscribed. Montaigne cares nothing for order and composition in his discourse. "Whether it come early or late, a useful maxim, a fine example, is always seasonable." Self-complacent with regard to his own faults, he ingenuously erects into rules the disorderly habits of his own thought. In his considerations on the qualities of style, it is a portrait which he draws, the portrait of his own peculiar style, rather than an ideal model that could be recommended to all. He desiderates "a simple, artless, and unaffected speech"; very good; but he does not hesitate to add that he likes it "unruly and desultory"; and in this he really agrees too heartily with his own peculiarities.

Montaigne gave health the first place among earthly blessings: "Health is a precious thing, and the only one which deserves that life should be given up to its pursuit." How could he have failed to recognize the importance of physical education? Hygiene already occupies his thoughts. He laments that modern peoples have lost the habit of "washing

their bodies daily," a custom which was formerly universally observed. In these matters, Montaigne likes to quote as an example his father, of whom he says that "there hardly ever was a man of his condition to equal him in all bodily exercises." Endowed with rare muscular strength, the older Montaigne seems to have indulged in parlour acrobatics, and could "go round his table on his thumb." It is true that his son had not inherited his physical strength. He was a "very fair runner," but confesses his unfitness for other bodily exercises. He could neither swim nor fence, at a time when his contemporaries went in crowds to learn fencing in Italy, where his own brother fought a duel. He could "hardly dance." He complains of his clumsy and "benumbed" hands. On the other hand, he was an excellent horseman. He could spend fifteen hours in the saddle without fatigue. His journey in Italy was a long ride on horseback. If Venice did not appeal to him, it was perhaps because in the town of gondolas "there is not a single horse." "Ideas," he says, "come to me at table, but especially on horseback." And he goes the length of saying, "I would rather be a good horseman than a good logician."

Montaigne was too thoroughly impressed with the fact that the physical and the moral being are closely

bound up in each other, to neglect the education of the body.

"The body has a large share in our being. . . . Those who would separate our two principal components and hold them apart, are wrong: on the contrary, they should be coupled and joined together; we should order our soul, not to stand aloof and despise the body, but to rally to it, to embrace it, cherish it, assist it, control it, advise it, to take it for a mate, in short, that their effects may not appear different and contradictory, but uniformly agree. . . ."

Without indulging, like Rabelais' pupil, in an orgy of gymnastics, Montaigne's pupil will know that to fortify his soul, he must begin by "stiffening his muscles." He will practise running, wrestling, dancing, hunting, learn to handle horses and weapons. He will expose himself to cold, to heat; will laugh at the precepts of medicine; he will inure himself to hardships, as the pupil of Locke will do later; he will harden himself against fatigue and pain. "It is not a body nor a soul that you are training, but a man." That is one of Montaigne's reasons for objecting to domestic education: a child who is kept on his mother's lap grows up soft and effeminate. The soul must not be obliged to groan and labour in the company of too tender and sensitive a body.

The child must be brought up roughly, and exposed to danger; and Montaigne, carried beyond all bounds by his theory, goes the length of authorizing, nay, encouraging in the young man excesses of every kind. "Even in debauchery I would have him outdo his companions." Better inspired, he will say elsewhere: "Let him be able to do all things, but let him love to do only what is good."

Montaigne said: "Even though I could make myself feared, I would rather make myself loved." This is the feeling which inspires him in his ideas on scholastic discipline. Here, again, he takes up vigorously the fight begun by Rabelais. He attacks and denounces the severe and brutal government of the colleges of his time, that which he underwent at the "Collége de Guyenne," a government made up of violence and tyranny, of horror and cruelty. He prohibits any severity in the education of a free soul. He mocks at masters who lose their temper with their pupils, after the manner of those "who shout before the culprit has come into their presence, and go on shouting for an eternity after he has withdrawn." He complains that in the bosom of the family children are punished too severely for "innocent mistakes"; that they are tormented out of season for "bold acts," for faults without consequence. The only failings which he insists must

be energetically repressed are lying and stubbornness." In public education, without inclining toward excessive indulgence, he wishes a "mild severity" to be the watchword of school discipline. He would do away with corporal punishment: —

"I have never seen the birch have any other effect but to make souls more craven and more maliciously stubborn."

He dreams of educational establishments, where "Gladness and the Graces" would be painted on the walls to cheer the children; where joy would reign as a reality in the class-room; where "dancing, games, leaping, and summersaults" would alternate with studies, attractive withal, and pursued without constraint. Less work, the whip abolished, pleasant lessons, in which the master invites his pupils to voluntary and easy efforts, violence and rough handling done away with; such cheerful and gentle discipline is the ideal which Montaigne wishes to see applied to the education "of those delicate and tender souls which we have to train toward honour and liberty."

Montaigne entertained no very flattering opinion of the nature of women, "of their ill-regulated mind, their morbid tastes, and their inherent weakness," so we cannot expect from him any broad-minded or lofty conception of feminine education. He criti-

cises the "Armandes," or blue-stockings of his time, but cannot even conceive the ideal of an "Henriette" with an "enlightened mind" on all subjects.[1] He scoffs at those of his fair contemporaries who lay claim to wit and erudition: "They quote Plato and St. Thomas in matters wherein the testimony of the man in the street would avail as much." Is not this what he did himself, in his constant quotations? Rhetoric, logic, science in general, are to them "useless drugs." Rhetoric would serve them only "to hide their fairness under beauties that are foreign to them." In the concessions he makes regarding the studies he is willing to allow them, there enters nearly as much contempt as in the prohibitions which he puts on them.

"If, however, they cannot brook being obliged to yield the palm to us in any respect, if they are curious of books and literature, poetry is a pastime fitted to their needs; it is a gay and subtle art, a many-worded and dissembling art, entirely made up of pleasure, and as showy as women themselves. . . ."

He will allow women some knowledge of history and of moral philosophy, but assigns a narrow aim to these studies, and a practical bearing on their conduct.

[1] The references are to characters in Molière's "*Les Femmes Savantes*." (Translator's note.)

"They will draw from these studies various useful lessons: they will learn to spin out the pleasures of life, and to bear with human fortitude the inconstancy of a servant, the rough bearing of a husband, and the importunity of years and of wrinkles. . . ."

In short, woman shall study — if study she must, — what is necessary to teach her patience, resignation, and obedience. Of her general culture and personal development Montaigne says not a word. He is of those who would pay their court to woman by maintaining her in ignorance, lest learning should be prejudicial to her natural charms. On this point, indeed, he quotes the authority of the Church in support of his mean and shabby views: "Neither we nor theology require much science in women." Yet Montaigne ought to have understood the necessity for a strong and serious feminine education, since he was conscious of the drawbacks and dangers of the frivolous training which was then in fashion:

"We bring up girls from childhood so that they may be expert in love; their graceful bearing, their adornment, their science, their speech, their whole education is directed to that one end. . . ."

What Montaigne lacked above all things to be a true educator was a love for childhood. He was too fond of peace to enjoy the company of children, even of his own. "I could not brook having them

reared near me." He would easily have done without offspring.

"Children are among the things which are in no wise very desirable, particularly at this time when it would be so difficult to make them good. . . ."

If he barricaded himself, so to speak, in his library, in order to avoid the society of men and to live with himself, how could he have opened the gates of his ivory tower to the noisy and uncomfortable turbulence of children? He did not understand their charm, blind as he was to the graces and pretty ways of those frail creatures, as they come into being, though one of our contemporaries has said: "What glimpses of Paradise are left to us on earth are due to the presence of children." Montaigne, on the contrary, waves them roughly out of his sight, unable to understand "the passion with which people kiss and fondle children hardly born," unable to find either in their souls or in their bodies "anything that renders them amiable."

He will not allow a mother to suckle her own child; he will not even have a foster-mother in the house. Reared himself in a village, and in mercenary hands, he is determined that his daughters also shall spend their early years far from their parents.

Montaigne, it must be confessed, was but little acquainted with that laborious virtue which curbs

our humours under the yoke of duty, which makes us watch overnight, and slave by day, in the service of those whom we love; tasks which become easy for the very reason that we love them. It is only when the child has grown that he consents to admit him to his society: —

"I would not avoid the company of my children. I should wish to act as their close adviser, and to enjoy the sight of their merriment and holiday-making. I should endeavour, by pleasant conversation, to foster in my children a lively and unfeigned affection for me. . . . That father is greatly to be pitied whose only hold on his children's affection is the need which they have of his help. . . . We must win respect through virtue, and love through kindness. . . ."

With young men, therefore, Montaigne becomes an affectionate father, because he finds pleasure in their society. Had he been blessed with any sons, he would, he says, have treated them kindly when their twentieth year drew nigh; he would have initiated them early to the family affairs, he would have dispossessed himself in their favour of a part of his estates, without waiting for the hour of testaments and death.

Montaigne does not seem to have had much feeling for the beauties of nature. He looks with more

admiration on the fair Italian women whom he sees in the streets in Florence, and at the windows in Rome, than on the great Alpine landscapes of the Tyrol mountain passes. In any case, he prefers a pretty countryside to the awe-inspiring aspects of rugged nature. After he has "made a plunge" into the Alps, he is delighted to find himself once more on the pleasant banks of the Adige, "when the mountains have lowered their horns a little." Just as among men he prefers those of a "temperate and average character," thus also in nature he prefers hills of moderate height, graceful sites, the "pleasant little meadows within the valleys." He admires the torrents of the Apennines especially when, "having lost their first fury, they become in the vales peaceful and gentle streamlets." Amidst high mountains, he likes best their green slopes with tilled fields, and villages nestling within their folds; and this sight suggests to him a most ingenious simile: —

"The ridges of the Tyrol mountains resemble a gown which one only sees crumpled up, but which, unfolded and stretched out flat, would form a great country, if all these mountains were under cultivation and inhabited. . . ."

He is also pleased to find among these mountains "pleasant and comfortable roads," along which one

may ride at ease; "so much so," he says, "that if he had to escort his daughter on her walks (Léonor was then eight years old), he would as lief do so on these roads as in an avenue of his gardens at Montaigne," — a passing thought given to his family which we note with pleasure in a somewhat neglectful father.

Neither is a feeling for art at all prominent in Montaigne. Even while travelling in Italy, he hardly seems to have felt the breath of the artistic Renaissance passing over his head. In vain had Michael Angelo and Raphael adorned the Eternal City with the novelty of their works. Montaigne passed on negligently without noticing them. And when, in an eloquent page of his *Diary*, he speaks of Rome, it is ancient Rome, the memories of the past, which he alone calls up: —

"He said that of Rome nothing was to be seen but the heavens under which it had been seated, and the outlines of the spot where it had lain; that this science which he had of ancient Rome was an abstract and contemplative science, nothing of which came under the senses; that those who said that at least the ruins of Rome were to be seen, asserted too much; for the ruins of so awesome a handiwork would bring more honour and reverence to its memory; this, he said, was naught but the sepulchre

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of Rome. The world, rising against her long domination, had first broken and shattered every piece of that admirable body, and because, although dead, overthrown and disfigured, it was still awe-inspiring, they had buried its very ruins. Whatever slight tokens of the ruin of Rome still appear above her bier, had been preserved, he said, by fate as a testimony to that infinite greatness which so many centuries, so many conflagrations, and the oft-repeated coalitions of the world to compass its ruin, had been unable to extinguish at all points. . . ."

Little touched by the embellishments of the new Rome, he said: —

"The buildings of this bastard Rome, which are now being fastened on these ruins, put me in mind of the nests which the sparrows and daws attach in France to the vaults of the churches which the Huguenots have just been wrecking."

Fine arts, plastic arts, therefore left Montaigne more or less indifferent. In Rome, however, the statues attract his attention; and he enumerates those which he admired most in the palace of the Cardinal of Ferrara. But he has hardly anything to say on the paintings; and what he does say betrays singular prejudices, since he will not even allow that painting is in the least capable of representing nature: —

"All our efforts cannot even succeed in picturing the nest of a little bird, with its texture and beauty, nor even the web of a puny spider. . . ."

Let us note, however, a theory which is of interest in art, and which, although expressed in a couple of lines, is pregnant with consequences: "I would naturalize art," — and he added, coining a word which neither lived nor deserved to live: "instead of *artialising* nature." — Montaigne thus associated himself with the movement which, during the last centuries of the Middle Ages, had already carried architects, cathedral sculptors, and miniature painters beyond artistic stagnation and traditional conventionality, and had led them to inaugurate a new art by introducing movement and life into it through the imitation of nature. Let us note also that Montaigne would have approved of the effort which is being made at the present time to provide schools and class-rooms with a cheerful and artistic setting, which surrounds the child with an atmosphere of beauty. He asked that the class-rooms should be strewn with flowers. He wished to see the walls adorned with the pictures of "Gladness and Joy, of Flora and the Graces."

Whatever may have been the lacunæ in Montaigne's mind, he came very near being a complete man. His pedagogy is open to nature and to life, as he wished works of art to be. It is at fault, how-

ever, in that it remains rather superficial, easy-going, and slight. Montaigne is a thinker and a writer of genius, and men of genius are perhaps not best fitted to become educators. Everything is easy to them: the resources of their rich nature dispense them from effort; hence they do not think of requiring it in others. They forget that the common herd of men do not enjoy the same faculties. Having reached without labour and without trouble the highest peaks of intellectual and moral life, they do not take into consideration that, even to rise midway to these heights, those who labour in the valley require a more intensive education and a harder discipline.[1]

Montaigne is none the less a wise counsellor, whose lessons will always be profitable. Between Erasmus, the erudite humanist, exclusively in love with *belles-lettres*, and Rabelais, the bold dreamer, who seems intent on cramming the whole encyclopædia of human knowledge into the brain of his disciple, — who was a giant, it is true, — at the risk of causing it to burst, Montaigne occupies an intermediate place, with his circumspect and moderate tendencies, averse to any excess.

[1] "Are we not all sons of Montaigne," said Félix Pécaut, who complained of it, "sons of Montaigne by the absolute freedom of our minds, but also by our disposition to look with indifference on the most various opinions?" (*Revue pédagogique*, 1888, Vol. I, p. 216.)

The child who has followed Montaigne's lessons will be above all clear-minded; he will possess a solid and acute judgment, a prudent and upright character. He will have tasted, like his master, "only the outer crust of science." But he will have surveyed the whole field of knowledge, lightly, "*á la française*"; this expression is indeed surprising from the pen of a sixteenth-century writer, at the close of the Middle Ages, whose logicians, truly, in no way announced the amiable lightness of mind of the French people. He will be a man devoted to duty, or at least a man of honour. Although averse to vain ceremony, he will show himself on all occasions polite and civil, prodigal of salutations, ever ready to "raise his bonnet"; especially in summer, because there is less risk of catching a cold in that season. . . . More important still, he will be a mild and tolerant man, independent in his ideas and straightforward in his speech. "Lying is the worst of faults." What he may lack, a little, will be the qualities of the heart. If Montaigne is silent with regard to the qualities of the heart, we are far from thinking with Guizot that this redounds to his honour. He will also lack a taste for action; and lastly, what Rabelais and the men of the Renaissance for the most part possessed to the highest degree: faith in science, enthusiasm, and confidence in the future.

III

Montaigne's Influence

"If we believe everything that Montaigne advises, and do all that he recommends, we may need to add thereto, and to take the pupil somewhat further than he did: but we must pass by the road which he took; if he did not say all, all that he did say is true, and before we may pretend to outstrip him, we must endeavour to overtake him." Thus spoke Guizot in 1812, not without some exaggeration, in the *Annales de l'Education*.[1] Indeed, long before the nineteenth century, many of Montaigne's pedagogic views were fully appreciated, and taken as sources of inspiration. Locke, Rousseau, borrowed largely from him. The *Solitaires*, or recluses of Port-Royal, in their *Logic*, put him under contribution, though they omitted any acknowledgment or thanks. Montaigne is really the chief of a school, as an English writer, Herbert Quick, proclaims in his *Educational Reformers*, where he declares that the author

[1] *Montaigne's Ideas on Education*, an article that has often been reprinted, and particularly in *Conseils d'un Père sur l'Education*, Paris, 1883.

of the *Essays* founded, in the field of pedagogy, a school of thinkers, the principal adherents to which, in later times, were Locke and Rousseau.[1] In Germany, several editions of Montaigne's pedagogical *Essays* have been published.[2] On all sides, due homage has been rendered to the merit of a pedagogy made up of good sense and wisdom, which paved the way for a more liberal and a broader education. Without aspiring to it, Montaigne has become one of the masters of human thought.

It is true that it is his work taken as a whole, even more than his short pedagogical sketch, which calls forth the almost unanimous admiration of his critics. Sainte-Beuve, imagining posterity as escorting Montaigne's funeral, introduces into the procession the most illustrious French writers: La Fontaine and Molière, Montesquieu and J.-J. Rousseau, Voltaire also, and many others. Did not Mme. de Sévigné exclaim: "Ah! what an amiable man! And how full of good sense his book is!"

To this throng of admirers must be added a number of foreign thinkers. Thus the American writer Emerson gives him a place in his gallery of *Represen-*

[1] *Educational Reformers*, latest edition, Cincinnati, 1883.

[2] For instance, the edition of E. Schmidt in the *Library of Pedagogical Classics*, Langensalza, 1876. Cf. also the editions of Karl Reimer (1872), of Schippard (1880), and the study on Montaigne by Wittslock (1874).

tative Men.[1] Beside Plato, "the Philosopher," and Shakespeare, "the Poet," Montaigne is pictured as "the Sceptic"; and Emerson wreathes him with flowers: "I remember the delight and wonder in which I lived with it" (*i.e.* an odd volume of Cotton's translation of the *Essays*).

Beside Emerson we must place Byron, of whom it was said [2] that Montaigne was the only great writer of past times whom he read with avowed satisfaction.

An even more unexpected testimony is that of Nietzsche, who, in that period of his intellectual evolution when he conceived a taste for the clearness of thought of French literature, celebrated the "charming loquacity" of Montaigne.[3]

People have not been content to read and admire Montaigne; they have taken up his thoughts, copied them, and developed them.

It was not Pascal, but Montaigne, who wrote: "He who imagines, as in a painting, this great picture of Mother Nature in her full majesty, and who, in this picture, looks upon himself, and not upon himself alone, but upon a whole kingdom, as a small stroke

[1] Translated into French by M. Izoulet, under the title of *Les Surhumains.* Montaigne is not *superhuman,* as M. Izoulet would have it, but he is a thoroughly *representative man.*

[2] By Leigh Hunt, quoted by Emerson. (Translator's note.)

[3] Cf. E. Faguet's recent book: *En lisant Nietzsche.*

made with a very fine point, that one alone judges of things in their right proportions. . . ."

It was not Descartes, but again Montaigne, who said: "That you can put nothing into a pupil's head simply by quoting some authority, and so to speak on credit . . . ;" or again: —

"When the Pyrrhonians affirm their doubt, we immediately take them by the throat to force them to confess that this much at least they know: that they doubt."

It was not Rousseau, but Montaigne again, who declared that "to refine the mind is not to make it wiser," and elsewhere: —

"The study of science weakens our courage and renders it effeminate, far more than it strengthens it and inures it to war." — "I think Rome fought better before she grew learned."

And likewise, do we not think we are listening to Fénelon, when we read in the *Essays:* "Education should be conducted with a gentle severity"? — or again, to Locke, in such a passage as this: "Harden the child against perspiration and cold, against the wind, the sun, and the dangers which he ought to look down upon."

One single work sufficed to acquire for Montaigne immortal renown. In that extraordinary success, we must assuredly ascribe a share to the delightful

style. Never did a man speak a language that was so new, so savoury, so supple and rich, very French withal, with a spice of the Gascon idiom. Montaigne is one of the creators of the French language. How many new words he coined, a number of which have survived! Picturesque expressions flow in an endless stream under his pen. Metaphors abound, metaphors that are new, rather than those "whose beauty has taken on the wrinkles of age." Nearly always the concrete image takes the place of the abstraction. "Cut these words," said Emerson, "and they would bleed; they are vascular and alive." Moreover, in the fresh novelty of that flowery language which blooms in full liberty, the boldness of the construction, the contempt for syntax, contribute to the seduction of a style both picturesque and poetical. Did not Montesquieu, who believed that even in prose, we can be a poet, put Montaigne among "the four great poets," with Plato, Malebranche, and Shaftesbury? The lack of order and arrangement, the desultoriness even of a thought which proceeds at random, without obeying any regular plan, are not without their attractiveness. Montaigne was no lover of continuous discourse: "I pause often for lack of breath." "A glimpse of a tuft of fur" crossing his path was enough to lead him off on a charming digression from his main

theme. The *Essays* resemble a collection of "news paragraphs," written by a journalist of great talent, at a time when journalism was non-existent. So that one should not attempt to read the *Essays* from end to end, as one reads a book of continuous and methodical doctrine. To enjoy all their charm and admire them unreservedly, one should read them in fragments, day by day, as they were written. They should be taken in small sips, so to speak. We can then enjoy to the full the "flow of gossip" of the wittiest of talkers; and appreciate the simplicity, the familiarity of conversation, of a writer who "talks to his paper as he would talk to any one," and of whom it was also Montesquieu who said, "In most authors, I see the author who writes; in Montaigne I see a man who thinks."

Original in his style, Montaigne is no less so in his ideas. I know, and he in no wise concealed, that he owes much to the writers of antiquity. "My book is a bunch of flowers for which I have provided only the thread." He often struts in borrowed feathers, and he used to say, "I wish some one would pluck the feathers off me," thus hinting that, if he were once stripped of all he had borrowed, there would remain little or nothing of the *Essays*. There would remain all the fine embroidery which an impulsive imagination worked on to the rough ground

of other people's thoughts, without reckoning all the new ideas that belong to him alone. Through all his reminiscences and his overflow of quotations from the poets, historians, and philosophers of Greece and Rome, there blows a modern spirit, and Montaigne's personality stands out on every page. He claimed his share of originality when he said that he used books, "not to shape his opinions, but to assist and support them, when once they were formed."

"In the books I read I am ever on the lookout for something to pilfer, that may serve to jewel or shore up my own."

If some chapters of the *Essays*, by their titles at least, are merely recollections of the short moral treatises which the philosophers of antiquity have left us, — *Of Anger*, *Of Constancy*, *Of Virtue*, — others are, so to speak, the first sketches of some of the books which have been written within the last three centuries by the most famous of our thinkers and philosophers; such are, for instance, the essays entitled, *Of Liberty of Conscience*, *Of Roman Greatness*. And is it not a fact that Pascal's *Pensées*, or *Thoughts*, had their origin in the famous chapter entitled *Apology of Raymond Sebond?* Montaigne is, so to speak, the middleman between ancient thought and modern thought. He makes antiquity

live again, and at the same time, by his novel and bold views, he opens a new era; and this, it would seem, without being conscious of it, for this man of progress does not believe in progress. He is a precursor without knowing it.

Montaigne had little faith either in the progress of the individual or in the progress of society. At the age of twenty, according to him, a human soul is "released from its ties," being already all that it is capable of becoming. In another passage, he fixes the age of thirty as a limit for the evolution of the individual; and he recalls the fact that most great men had accomplished their glorious actions before that age. He quotes himself as an example, and says that since his thirtieth year, "his mind, like his body, has gone back rather than advanced." The most that he will concede is that for those who make good use of their time, "Knowledge and experience increase with life;" but sharpness of mind, promptness and firmness of judgment, "those faculties which are far more ours, more important and more essential, fade and languish."

Montaigne — untrue in this respect to the spirit of the Renaissance — does not believe, either, in the collective progress of humanity. He neither believes in it, nor even desires it. He would like "to put a peg into our wheel to stop its motion."

And yet he prepared that progress in which he had no faith. His book is full of progressive views on the most diverse matters. Is he not in advance of his time by that spirit of tolerance which made him condemn the fanaticism of his contemporaries? It was on the morrow of the St. Bartholomew massacre that he wrote, "We put a very high value on our conjectures when we authorize ourselves of them to roast a man alive." Does he not condemn the rack, and death by torture, which were still to endure for generations? He is a humanitarian, in that age of savage cruelty of which La Noue could say, "The French are changed into tigers;" and Henry IV, "We are always ready to cut each other's throats." He has "a cruel hatred of cruelty." He waxes indignant at the abominable sights which he has the grief of witnessing.

"We have seen neighbours and fellow-citizens, under the cloak of piety and religion, torture and tear to pieces a body full of feeling, roast him on a slow fire, and leave him to be bitten and devoured by dogs and swine."

If he does not seem to suspect the future flights of science, he foresees that on some points at least the future is destined to modify and improve the present state of things. We have seen how roughly he handled medicine, with the irritation of an invalid

whom doctors are unable to cure, even though they prescribe for the calculus which he suffered from such fantastic remedies as "powdered rat's droppings! . . ." And yet he prophesies that a day will come when medicine will render real services to humanity, the day when each branch of medicine has become specialized, and when there will be a competent doctor for each kind of disease.

Montaigne does not remain absorbed in the idealistic meditations of philosophical dilettantism. He is already a practical man, with a thought for useful arts, interested in commerce and industry. In his travels, he studies and compares the different systems of healing, the state of the public fountains. He is as anxious to understand the working of a hydraulic machine as to visit public libraries, art galleries, or churches. In the towns of Germany, he notes that our neighbours "have got iron and good workmen in abundance, and that they are far ahead of us." France was already outdistanced by Germany. He inquires about the institutions which may facilitate commercial life; he would like to see in every town a central information office, a kind of labour exchange.

The prejudices of a narrow patriotism are unknown to Montaigne. The love he bore to his "wretched country" did not prevent him from doing justice

to other nations. Like Socrates, he might have said, "I am not a citizen of Athens, I am a citizen of the world." He sees with "infinite pleasure" the efficient policing, the simple way of living, and the freedom of Switzerland. He has a better opinion of the Italians than of the French; he thinks "their mind is more alert, their judgment sounder." With regard to his fellow-countrymen, "an indiscreet nation," he criticises, among other failings, their bellicose temper: "Put down three Frenchmen amid the deserts of Libya, they will not remain for a month together, without molesting and scratching each other." In his *Diary of Travel*, it is evident that the very favourable judgments he passed on the nations he visited were mingled with some little contempt for his own country, "which he hated so that his heart rose against it." But he was enthusiastic with regard to Paris, which he criticised only for the rank smell of its mud, as he did Venice for that of its marshes. It is quite a modern writer who sings this hymn to the glory of Paris: —

"I am never so angry with France but that I look upon Paris with a kindly eye. Paris has possessed my heart since my childhood, and like other excellent things, has retained its hold on me ever since. The more beautiful towns I have seen since then, the more strongly the beauty of this one has

established its claim to my affection; I love it for itself, and more in its own being than when overladen with external pomp; I love it tenderly, even in its warts and blemishes; I am French only through this great town, great by its people, great by the happiness of its situation, great especially and beyond compare by the variety and diversity of its conveniences: it is the glory of France and one of the most noble ornaments of the world. God protect it from our quarrels and divisions! . . ."

Even the method of reasoning practised by Montaigne is, in some respects, animated by a spirit which is new. In the marshalling of his thoughts he is not so wayward and devoid of order as one might think. Nearly always, as he proceeds, he founds himself on facts, — facts of every kind, it is true, which are not all authentic, which he has not observed for himself, and the responsibility for which he lays on the shoulders of the writers from whom he borrows them; but after all it is on facts, historical or not, which his erudition provides him with in plenty, that he founds his reflections and conclusions. This is already in a sense the method of Bacon. Montaigne does not proceed by deduction, according to the geometrical method which will be that of Descartes; but he observes, and proceeds by induction, before ever Bacon had advised this

course. The *Essays* have been called the Preface to the *Instauratio magna.*

It is especially himself that Montaigne observes, and he may be considered as the inspirer of that introspective psychology which takes for its aim the analysis of self, and for its means interior observation; that psychology which was long held in honour by French philosophers, and which, in spite of its shortcomings, has been of such advantage for the knowledge of human nature. He has analyzed most acutely the failings of memory. He has spoken in happy terms of the relation between the soul and the feelings: "The soul is touched very lightly and so to speak glided over by the gentle impressions of the senses." Nor is he blind to the difficulties of this process of interior reflection.

"It is," he said, "a thorny undertaking to follow such a vagabond as our mind, to reach the opaque depths of its inner recesses, to select and catch hold of the light air-waves of its motions."

But he added, "If there is no description equally difficult, there is none either that is of such utility." He devoted himself to it entirely, towards the end of his life: "For several years I have had myself only as the object of my thoughts." To justify himself, he quoted the example of Socrates: "Is there aught that Socrates deals with at greater length

than with himself?" Like the Greek philosopher, he esteemed other sciences as worthy of esteem only "in the service of life," and therefore looked upon the knowledge of Self as the most important of all.

There is scarcely a pedagogical question on which Montaigne had not a word to say, a word that hits the mark, and is modern in sense.

The boarding system he condemns unhesitatingly: "I will not have this boy imprisoned. . . ."

The overworking of scholars, which in our days has been written about so largely, he denounces severely: —

"I would not corrupt the child's mind by keeping him cramped at his work for fourteen or fifteen hours a day, like a porter. . . ."

Excessive mental work, an indiscreet application to study, a rash thirst for knowledge, all these, according to Montaigne, lead simply to dulness, stupidity, or insanity.

"There is nothing so charming as the little children of France, but they generally disappoint the hopes that had been founded on them. I have heard people of understanding assert that these colleges, to which they are sent, besot them thus."

On the subject of the study of modern languages, Montaigne was three centuries in advance of us.

However, it is through travel, and residence abroad, that he would foster this branch of education: —

"We should begin to take our scholar about from his earliest youth, and start with those neighbouring nations the language of which is most different from our own (there is little doubt that this refers to Germany), and which the tongue cannot accommodate itself to, unless it be trained early."

The "direct method" which we apply to-day, and which consists in learning languages less through grammar than through practice and conversation, was recommended by Montaigne even for Latin.

"Active" methods, which demand reflection on the part of the pupil, have found in our time no more zealous advocate.

We require at the present day that some ethical teaching should be given early, and introduce into the fourth and third classes [1] an elementary and familiar course on the duties of man. Montaigne was already in favour of this.

We live in a busy century, when every one is in a hurry to elbow his way to the front. It was already thus in the days of Montaigne, who would not allow his pupil to labour too long at books. Life

[1] The "quatrième" and "troisième" of a French lycée correspond approximately to the third and fourth forms, respectively, of an English public school. (Translator's note.)

is short, he says, and he complains that the entrance of young men upon active careers is delayed too long. "They are not put to work early enough." Too large a share of life is given to "idleness and apprenticeship."

"Our child is in a hurry: only the first fifteen or sixteen years of his life should be devoted to pedagogic training; the remainder should be given to action. . . ."

We think of organizing, for the moral and social education of youth, public holidays and celebrations; here again Montaigne was an initiator: —

"Good governments are careful to assemble the citizens, and to marshal them, not only for solemn services of worship, but also for drill and for games. . . ."

And the result, he says, will be this happy consequence, that "the society and friendship of men will be increased."

Though in education Montaigne is an innovator, and at times an extremely bold one, in politics he is the most timorous of conservatives. Do not suggest to him that any changes might be made in established custom, whatever evil he may think of it. He has no love for revolutions, and he looks upon any theoretical discussion on the best form of government as a futile academic exercise.

"We are fond of finding fault with our present condition; and yet I hold that it is vice and folly to desire the rule of a few, in a popular State; or, under a monarchy, some other form of government."

Ah! no doubt, if all present conditions were first swept away, if an ideal city were to be built on new ground, "in a new world," Montaigne would have some "picture of a policy" to propose, some plan of government, different from that which he supports, without denying, be it said, either its abuses or its vices. But we are face to face with a world "already made, and formed to certain customs." To try and reform it would be, to begin with, more or less impossible.

"Whatever means we be allowed in order to straighten it and reorganize it, we can hardly hope to twist it out of its accustomed folds. . . ."

And if a revolution were possible, is it certain that the State would benefit? Montaigne is a conservative especially because he despairs of achieving anything better.

"All great changes shake the State and introduce disorder. . . . The movements of humanity cannot better its lot. . . . Good does not necessarily succeed evil; another evil may take its place."

Just as in religion Montaigne the sceptic, the

rationalist, concludes in favour of obedience to Catholicism, so in politics, dissatisfied though he is, he advocates respect for the established order of things; and he endeavours to comfort the impatient spirits who clamour for reform and wish to save the country from the evils which it is suffering:

"Our polity is in evil plight: others have been in worse, without dying. . . ."

Montaigne, then, is a conservative. But it sometimes happens that this conservative speaks a revolutionary language. Or at least he takes note, without protest, of the bold reflections uttered by strangers, notable Americans, on certain institutions of the European states, such as hereditary kingship, or the unequal distribution of wealth. He was at Rouen, towards 1565, with Charles IX. There the youthful king had occasion to receive three natives of Brazil, and he conversed with them for a long time. They were asked what, among the French uses and customs, had surprised them most. Among other things, they answered that what seemed to them very strange, was that "so many big-bearded men, strong and well-armed, should submit to obey a child. . . ." They had been even more surprised to find among the French "men filled and gorged with all kinds of comforts,"

while some of their fellow-beings "stood begging at their gates, wasted by hunger and poverty"; they could not understand how "these poor people could suffer such injustice, why they did not seize the others by the throat, or set their houses on fire. . . ."

Montaigne is not so much absorbed in the study of antiquity as to forget to open his eyes not only to the present, but to the future of modern societies and of the whole of humanity. He was acquainted with the Capitol and its plan before he had seen the Louvre, with the Tiber before he had seen the Seine; but that does not prevent him from giving his attention, with a passionate curiosity, to the questions of discovery and conquest in the New World. Thus, after a pompous description of popular holidays at Rome, he carries us without transition to the other shore of the Atlantic: —

"Our world has recently discovered another, not less extensive, less filled, less large-limbed, and yet so new and so childish that it is still being taught its *a b c*. . . ." [1]

And he proceeds to foretell the future destinies of that child-world; he seems to have a foreboding of its rapid development, and also of the damage it will do one day to the older world: —

[1] *Essays*, Book III, Chap. VI.

"This other world will just be beginning to shine when ours is growing dim; the universe will be smitten with the palsy; one of its limbs will be numbed, and the other in its full vigour."

Does not the prodigious intensity of life of the United States partly justify Montaigne's predictions? He was amazed at the "awful magnificence of the towns of Cuzco and Mexico." What would he have said of the colossal growth of the cities of New York and Chicago?

Meanwhile Montaigne complains, with eloquent anger, of the conduct of the Spaniards in their barbarous conquests. He would have wished to see the populations of America, which had no other care but "to spend life happily and pleasantly," in the hands of peaceful and gentle civilizers, and not in the grip of greedy conquerors, intent on their prey. And, always filled with admiration for antiquity, he exclaims: —

"What a pity that so noble a conquest did not fall to the lot of Alexander, or of those ancient Greeks and Romans! . . . They would have gently smoothed and polished the savage nature of these peoples; they would have established between them and ourselves a brotherly intercourse and understanding. On the contrary, what have we seen? So many towns levelled to the ground, so

many nations exterminated, so many millions of people cut down with the sword, and the richest and most beautiful part of the world thrown into confusion for the sake of a trade in pearls and pepper!"

In the contemplation of those American tribes, who lived peacefully under natural laws, before their oppressors came and taught them the ways, institutions, and vices of civilization, Montaigne, the thoroughly civilized Montaigne, allows himself some utopian day-dreams. He goes so far as to regret, as a lost golden age, the savage life of primitive peoples. One of the passages in which he dwells on his fancies has been copied by Shakespeare. The English poet had read the *Essays* in the translation published by Florio in 1601.[1] Thereupon a French critic imagined, somewhat rashly, that Montaigne had exercised on Shakespeare's mind a profound influence.[2] According to him, the reading of the *Essays* considerably modified the character of Shakespeare's dramatic output after 1603, by introducing into his dramas a new philosophy. *Julius Cæsar*, *Hamlet*, *Coriolanus*, according to him, are

[1] The copy of Florio's translation, with marginal notes by Shakespeare, is in the British Museum. It was even declared that an autograph of Shakespeare had been found in it, but the document appears to be a forgery.

[2] Cf. an article by Philarète Chasles, in the *Journal des Débats* (October, 1846).

full of Montaigne. Those are very bold affirmations. All that is certain is that the author of *The Tempest* put into the mouth of one of his characters, shipwrecked with a few companions in misfortune on a desert island, a tirade textually borrowed from Montaigne: —

> "GONZALO: I' the commonwealth I would by contraries
> Execute all things; for *no kind of traffic*
> Would I admit; *no name of magistrate;*
> *Letters should not be known; riches, poverty,*
> *And use of service, none; contract, succession,*
> *Bourn,* bound of land, tilth, vineyard, none;
> *No use of metal, corn, or wine, or oil;*
> No occupation; all men idle, all;
> And women too," etc.[1]

Montaigne happened to write, once, in a moment of ill-humour, "the vulgar rabble. . . ." He must not, however, be taken for an aristocrat who despises the people. He knows what virtues the stout hearts of the people may conceal. Of one of the *Three Good Women* whose story he tells, he says that she was of humble extraction, and that "among those of that condition it is nothing new to meet with instance of rare kindness." Nurtured at first

[1] *The Tempest* (1612), Act II, Sc. I. Cf. *Essays*, Book I, Chap. XXX. We italicize the words which are textually borrowed from Montaigne.

in a humble village home, with common peasants for his godfather and godmother, he never ceased to "devote himself to the lowly." He was a country gentleman, and if he took little interest in agriculture, of which he had not the remotest notion, he at least sympathized with the farmers. The peasantry, he used to say, in their manner of life and conversation, are better "regulated" than philosophers.

"Let us look down at the poor people whom we see scattered on the ground, bending low over their work: they know nothing of Aristotle or Cato, of example or precept; yet Nature draws from them every day feats of constancy and of patience which are both purer and harder to perform than those which we study so diligently at school."

Sometimes, escaping from his royalist traditions, Montaigne declares that "the supremacy of the people appears to him most natural and most equitable." Equality was, in his eyes, "the foundation of equity." He was not lacking in fraternal compassion for the humble; he showed it by sheltering in his castle little beggars, whom he tried to rescue from beggary and poverty, and who, for that matter, once clad and fed, bolted, as later on the little vagabonds will do whom Pestalozzi has gathered off the highways.

The theologians of Rome reproached Montaigne, among other things, with his use and abuse of the word "fortune," because he thus sacrificed Providence, the Divine will, in the government of human affairs, to force of circumstances, fate, or chance. Modern philosophy levels the same reproach at him, but for other reasons. Montaigne had not sufficient faith in the power of the will, in the effects of human reflection. He does not feel clearly enough that it is man who can be, if he chooses, the artisan of his own destiny. He looks upon "fortune," that is to say, everything that is independent of the human will, as the true ruler over this world. "Luck and ill luck," he says, "are sovereign powers."

We must not, however, allow it to be said that the exercise of the will was unknown to Montaigne. A volition is, in its essence, only a strong thought, and who would dream of denying that he had strong and virile thoughts? Some one went the length of saying of the *Essays* that by the admiration and reverence which Montaigne professes for heroes of all ages, they were in a sense a school for the will.

Montaigne would have been surprised, I think, if some one could have foretold to him the extraordinary success which the future had in store for the *Essays*, — editions innumerable, translations into

foreign languages, as many readers as there are people in the world with a taste for letters. He would have been delighted as well as surprised: for we must not take him at his word when he affects indifference and contempt for glory. He admits occasionally that praise was agreeable to him, whatever quarter it came from. If he put Mlle. de Gournay very high among the remarkable persons of his age, the esteem in which he held her was largely due to the touching devotion shown to him by this young lady, whose mind, after all, was not above the average, but who acted as a harbinger of his future renown. We must not take him at his word when he speaks of the "nihility" of his works, and professes to be a man "of the common clay." Insincere in this respect, with his feigned modesty, he knew himself too well, he had too unerring a judgment, not to be conscious of his own merit.

Had it been vouchsafed to him to know the appreciations — in their extreme diversity — of the crowd of commentators who have fastened on the *Essays*, he would have been flattered by their praise, and at heart grieved by their criticisms. But he would have been even more amused by their contradictions. He would have taken pleasure in gathering from their contrary affirmations new arguments for scoffing at

the uncertainty of human judgment, and for pointing to the difficulty of adopting settled opinions. And without pretending to imitate his marvellous style, — only a La Bruyère could make the attempt,[1] — this is perhaps the tenor, if not the form, of some of the reflections which would have occurred to him while reading his critics: —

"I see," he would have thought, "that, in spite of the long succession of years, the inconstancy of human opinions has not changed within the last three hundred years: they still fluctuate and vary. Here, for instance, is one of your great ministers of education, Guizot, who has extolled me to the skies and loaded me with praise which I should never have dared to aspire to in my most presumptuous moods. Yes, but here is something calculated to humble my pride, if I could feel any; for what do I read in the work of Guillaume Guizot, the son, I think, of my panegyrist? That I committed 'the mistake of putting forth as a programme my own personal education, which came to nothing. . . .' This is rather hard on me, and I appeal from the son to the father. Was my education such a total failure?

'What else does this severe critic say? That I

[1] Cf. La Bruyère's "pastiche" of Montaigne in the *Characters*, Chap. V: *Of Society and Conversation.*

sketched 'a plan of education for a gentleman of high standing, according to the recollections of a spoilt child. . . .' I, a 'spoilt child'? Why, you forget that I was brought up in a village, roughly, like a rustic; that I was trained to the humblest and commonest manner of living, to frugality and austerity; that if peradventure my life did not conform to the habits of my early youth, the fault lay, not with the education which I had received, but with my own inclinations. You forget that I was left in this poor village so long as I was at nurse, and even after that; and that later, when I was hardly six years of age, I was shut up in the 'Collége de Guyenne,' in a jail for captive youth. It was said to be the best school in France, with excellent teachers, at least two of whom, Buchanan and Muret, have remained famous; but still, it was a school, and caresses were few.

"It is true that my excellent father, the best that ever was, when he kept me near him, dealt with me in a mild and free manner, exempt from any rigorous subjection, wishing to train my soul in all gentleness and liberty; but it was only when I was at home that I enjoyed this liberty, and until the age of thirteen I was scarcely ever at Montaigne except in holiday time.

"It is true also that, on my return from nurse,

my father wrapped me up in the tenderest solicitude, carried to such a superstitious excess that he was careful to have me wakened by the sound of some musical instrument, lest my brain should be injured by too sudden an awakening. Wherein perhaps lies the reason that I never loved music, having had a surfeit of what I was given to taste prematurely.

"Socrates, who spoke much of himself, as I also have done, said of the dialogues of Plato, if we are to believe tradition: 'How many fine things that young man makes me say, which I never thought of!' I might say likewise of some of my historians that they have discovered in me qualities, and perhaps also faults, of which I was unaware. And yet, God knows how I studied and watched myself throughout my life, how I observed my inner self and meditated on it! Thus I learn from Mr. Grün [1] that I was an economist. That is going beyond the truth, though it is a fact that during my municipal administration I advocated freedom of trade, and did what I could to turn the citizens of Bordeaux away from politics by directing their activity towards commerce. Others have said that I was a philologist, because I wrote the chapter on *Chargers*. . . .

"Some have complained that I was over-communicative. But when I read all the works which

[1] M. Grün, *Vie publique de Montaigne.*

patient scholars accumulate on my memory, I find that I had not told everything. How touching to behold, three centuries after my death, men of the nineteenth century labouring with such perseverance to elucidate the obscure points of my life, ferreting right and left! Should I not be particularly grateful to Dr. Payen, who spent over twenty years rummaging in every nook and cranny of my life and work? He became smitten with a real passion for me. Yes, his love for me was equal to that of my dear 'daughter of alliance,' Mlle. de Gournay. And to how many others do I not owe thanks? They have studied even the arm-chair in which I sat in my library, and which was rediscovered in the attics of the castle of Montaigne.[1] I never sat in it for long; my mind slept when my legs were not in motion; and in this respect, I, who frequented every philosophic sect of antiquity, was a faithful follower of the peripatetic sect, whose disciples studied as they walked.

"But among all those who have recently busied themselves with me, there are two in particular, whom I distinguish, and put by themselves. Firstly, Mr. Champion, who deserves this credit, that he read my work from beginning to end, without tiring

[1] Cf. the print entitled *le Fauteuil de Montaigne*, by M. Gély, Périgueux, 1865.

of my prolixity and self-repetition. Among my critics are there many who could say as much? No doubt, I could debate with him the question whether, as he believes, I several times modified my way of thinking, and went through several phases; whether, as he declares, two souls cohabited within me; whether, in short, there was, as people say to-day, an evolution in my character and my thought. But this discussion would lead us too far, and I shall merely refer Mr. Champion to one of the men who have analyzed the spirit of the *Essays* with most insight, to Sainte-Beuve, who is willing to admit that, after all, 'there was some unity in my ideas.' I have expressly stated that my judgment, almost from my birth, was *one;* and that with regard to universal opinions, I took up from my childhood the standpoint which I was to adhere to. And with all due respect to Mr. Champion, there is one point on which he is certainly mistaken; never, at any time of my life, did I give way to 'violent party spirit and to a sort of fanaticism.'

"The other is Mr. Émile Faguet. He has understood me. I can almost see lurking about his lips the ironical smile that used to play on my own. He is the true heir to my thought, and if he had lived in my time, I would have made him my 'son of alliance,' the brother of Mlle. de Gournay.

"Not that he deals so very tenderly with me. He is much more inclined to severity. But that is not to be wondered at, since he is undertaking to criticise me. When I went over my own works, I used to feel out of temper with myself. Mr. Faguet maintains, for instance, that I will teach children nothing; at least, little or nothing. And yet did I not write, appropriating one of Plutarch's thoughts: 'What should children learn? What they need to know to grow into men'? And again, is it fair to say that in the government of children, I believed in a *laisser faire* policy, and even in allowing them to do nothing? Because I have confessed that I had no taste for tedious work, should it be inferred that I ever advised against work, against attractive work, founded on affection and willing interest? And have not your best pedagogists reached the same conclusion? Do they not also recommend that the child's attention be engaged by making his work pleasurable?

"To judge fairly of a man, you must take his circumstances into account, you must apply to him what is now called the theory of environment. Before the century in which I lived, there had been an abuse of vain and barren science, bristling with thorns and briers. Perhaps I inclined somewhat too complacently in the opposite direction, towards

easy and pleasant study. There had been also an abuse of harsh discipline, against which it was necessary to react. Perhaps if I had lived in a time like yours, when there is a complaint of general 'slackness,' I should have shown myself firmer and more severe. That is what Mr. Faguet has clearly understood, when he observes that I was addressing men who were lacking in just those faculties of moderation. I inclined a little, and perhaps a little too far, on the side towards which they had no inclination whatever.

"He is also deserving of praise for not always taking me seriously. I wrote the *Essays* only to occupy my hours of loneliness, for my own amusement. But what pleases me especially is that he has defended me, after some others, against that reproach of scepticism which has fastened on my name like a legend. Ah! I often harboured doubts, to be sure! I put away from me, with all my might, both prejudice and superstition. But on many a point I had faith, and a firm faith. I had faith in justice, not in human justice, which is often most unjust and iniquitous, but in essential, natural, and universal justice. I believed in tolerance, and practised it. And most of all, I believed in the obligation to seek and to tell the truth. Truth is so great a thing that we should scorn no undertaking

that can lead us towards it. To speak the truth is the very foundation of virtue. Truth should be loved for its own sake. And it is no doubt because I loved truth that in spite of a few censors who have jeered at me, I have met with many readers who have esteemed and loved me."

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The editions of Montaigne are extremely numerous; we shall only quote the more important. Montaigne published during his lifetime two editions: the first, in 1580, at Bordeaux, in 2 vols.; this edition includes only the first two Books; the second, in 1588, Paris, 1 vol.; the latter included a third Book and *six hundred additions to the first two.* Mlle. de Gournay next published two editions of the *Essays*, one in 1595, revised and increased by *a third more than in the preceding editions*, from notes written by Montaigne during the last four years of his life; the other in 1635, in which the original text is often altered.

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Florio's translation, edited by J. H. McCarthy, 2 vols.

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[1] Compiled by the Translator.

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